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The Knower and the Known in Merleau-Ponty's Epistemology

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THE KNOWER AND THE KNOWN

IN

MERLEAU-PONTY'S EPISTEMOLOGY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The epistemological problem that I shall investigate in this thesis is the separation of the knowing subject from the object that is known. Generally, this problem is called "the subject-object dichotomy." Traditionally only the mind has been considered as the knower, while the body has been thought of merely as a passive vehicle of data. Thus one has been left with the mind separated from the body and from the objects of knowledge by the body.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a contemporary French phenomenologist, has sought to overcome the separation between the knower and the known by understanding the body as a crucial dimension of the active knower. The purpose of this present study is to examine whether and how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body can be said to eliminate the subject-object dichotomy.

In the first chapter, I explicate Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment, including his critique of traditional theories of perception, as well as his exploration of the importance of the body and the role of language to the act of knowing. In the second chapter, I trace the application of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy to epistemology, giving special attention to our knowledge of the world, other persons, and ourselves. I conclude that the epistemic gap between the knower and the known can be overcome, along the lines proposed by Merleau-Ponty, by viewing the body at the outset as an intentional, active knower.

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INTRODUCTION

The epistemological problem that I shall investigate in this thesis is the separation of the knowing subject from the object that is known.[1] Generally this problem is called the "subject-object dichotomy." In traditional epistemologies, for example those of Plato, Descartes, Locke and Kant, the knowing subject is presumed to be the mind alone. Even empiricists, who claim that we attain knowledge through the senses, understand the senses as mere vehicles of data which are known with the mind. Thus the body is not considered as an active knower, or for that matter as a part of the knower at all. One is then left, first with the mind separated from the body, and further with the mind separated from the objects to be known.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a contemporary French phenomenolgist, has sought to overcome the distance between the knower and the known. It should perhaps be noted at the outset that Merleau-Ponty never finished his epistemology. At the time of his death he was working on a manuscript, which was originally entitled The Origin of Truth, that was eventually published under the title The Visible and the Invisible. There is, however, ample material in his earlier works from which to work toward a fresh approach to epistemological questions, especially that of the subject-object dichotomy. Naturally what follows is only a suggestion concerning the application of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body to this question of the "epistemic gap" between the knower and the known.

The epistemic distance between the knower and the known may

perhaps be overcome by viewing the body as a point of intersection or overlap between the subject and the object of knowledge. In order for the body to serve as a connection between these two terms of the knowing relationship, it must be thought of as an active and essential dimension of the knowing subject, rather than as an object among other objects in the world. For Merleau-Ponty the body is construed as a body-subject, a meaning-seeking, intentional being.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty has sought to redefine the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known on the basis of this distinctive understanding of the role of the body in knowledge. The terms he uses to characterize this fresh view of the above relationship suggest an interactive relationship of interdependence and symbiosis. He employs such descriptions as: "reciprocal," "dialogical," "inter-subjective," "lived," "inhabited," "communication," "communion," and "coition."[2] Such descriptions clearly suggest an active, two-way relationship which constrasts strongly with the passive, one-directional character of the relationship between the knower and the known in traditional epistemologies.

Perhaps the dynamics comprising an electromagnetic force-field might serve as a helpful analogy here. The positive and negative poles within such a force-field only have existence and significance in relation to each other. When either of these poles ceases to exist, so does the other. Although either of the poles can be subjected to extensive analysis in and of itself in the abstract, it can never be isolated nor understood apart from the other pole. Nevertheless, it remains the case that there are two poles, each with

a distinct identity and character; they are never absorbed into each other. So it is with the relationship between the knower and the known in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology. Although each gets its identity and significance in relation to the other, they are not the same entity. Rather, they are two interdependent poles of one reality.

The focus of this study, then, is the subject-object dichotomy of traditional epistemology and Merleau-Ponty's effort to overcome it. What I hope to show is that one can overcome this dichotomy by, and perhaps only by, taking the body of the knower seriously as a knowing subject and not merely as an object among other objects. The epistemic gap between the knower and the known is bridged by interpreting the body as the axis around which the dynamic of knowing pivots, as the intersection wherein the knowing subject and the known object meet.

Merleau-Ponty was an author of a wide variety of works in phenomenology, socio-political philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology. The main attention of this present study will be given to his early major work, Phenomenology of Perception (written in 1945), in which he developed his philosophy of embodiment. The following additional texts will also be used: The Primacy of Perception (a collection of essays written over a period of years), Sense and Non-Sense (1948), Signs (1960), Prose of the World (1961), and The Visible and the Invisible (1961). The principal secondary literature includes the most recent American commentators on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, especially on the role of the body in his work. The main interpreters are: Mary Rose Barral, John F. Bannan, John Sallis, Richard Zaner, Remy C. Kwant, and Samuel B. Mallin.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. The aspect of epistemology under consideration here does not pertain to questions of truth, justification or belief. Its focus is on the knowing process itself at the experiential, first-order level.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, tr. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), pp. 185, 354, 352, 304, 311 and 320, respectively.

Chapter One

Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Embodiment

First of all, it is important to begin with an outline of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of both empiricism and rationalism, as well as of Kant's epistemology. These three approaches to the problem of the relationship between the subject and the object form the background against which Merleau-Ponty writes, and it is the difficulties of these traditions that the philosophy of embodiment aims to clarify and resolve. I will begin by tracing Merleau-Ponty's critique of these accounts of perceptual knowledge and then move on to a treatment of his own account in terms of the body as a perceptual system, including his philosophy of language.

1. A Critique of Traditional Theories of Perception

The main problem with traditional empiricism, according to Merleau-Ponty, is that it does not take into account the structure of perception as it actually occurs. Empiricism treats experience as made up of sensory units and thereby reduces perception into separate, "atomistic blocks," which is both confusing and inaccurate.

> Pure sensation will be the experience of an undifferentiated instantaneous, dotlike impact. It is unnecessary to show, since authors are agreed on it, that this notion corresponds to nothing in our experience, and that the most rudimentary factual perceptions that we are acquainted with, in creatures such as the ape and the hen, have a bearing on relationships and not on any absolute terms.[1]

Traditional empiricism does not take into account that we experience sensations, not as isolated units, but always as parts of a whole. We do not have "pure sensations" but, rather, experiences

in relationship to other experiences. "The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a 'field'."[2] Thus, we do not have a sensation of redness or coldness in isolation, without a context, but we might see a red ball on a white table or we might feel cold because we are inadequately dressed. Although even empiricists acknowledge that if perception is reduced to these "undifferentiated, instantaneous, dotlike" sensations, one cannot account for knowledge, their concept of the mind as a passive receiver of data provides no way to get beyond meaningless sensory bombardment. For the empiricist view of mind, as a tabula rasa onto which impressions of redness, squareness and smoothness are drawn, involves no dynamic by means of which we pull individual sensations together into meaningful wholes.

Empiricism tries to deal with this difficulty, and thereby account for the possibility of integrated experience and knowledge by introducing the concept of "association." Mere association of impressions, however, does not account for how a cluster of impressions becomes a meaningful or significant object of knowledge. The mere grouping of sensations does not cause my mind to apprehend the object of perception as a unified whole; my mind would then merely record a group of individual sensations. How a mind groups or associates sensations, and which sensations it clusters together, and why are the crucial epistemological questions which empiricism fails to answer. In fact these questions do not even arise within Merleau-Ponty's approach. As he himself says:

> the significance of the percept, far from resulting from an association, is in fact presupposed in all association, whether it concerns the perception of a figure before one, or the recollection of former experiences.[3]

> If we confine ourselves to phenomena, the unity of the thing in perception is not arrived at by association, but is a condition of association, and as such precedes the delimitations which establish and verify it, and indeed precedes itself.[4]

The significance and unity of an object of knowledge, then, is not drawn onto a "blank tablet" of the mind by the sensations , but in the phenomenal flow of experience an object is perceived as meaningful. The mind cannot be merely a passive receiver, even of associated perceptions. There is something in the knowing subject, or more properly in the relationship between the knower and the known, which selects and organizes the percepts into meaningful wholes. This is not in the Kantian sense of static categories of the understanding, but rather in the relational sense, wherein the percepts are experienced as meaningful at the outset. The basic problem that Merleau-Ponty sees with empiricism is that it understands experience as comprised of atomistic sensations, associated clusters of impressions. As such, empiricism cannot account for knowledge because any significance that the knower experiences in relation to the known object is not part of the sensations themselves, and thus goes unaccounted for. Some of the problematic implications which Merleau-Ponty sees folloiwng from empiricism's separation of experience into atomistic sensations need to be mentioned. To begin with, the "cultural world," or the "human world" as Merleau-Ponty calls it, is not allowed for in empiricism.

> For most of us Nature is no more than a vague and remote entity, overlaid by cities, roads, houses and above all by the presence of other people. Now, for empiricism, "cultural" objects and faces owe their distinctive form, their magic power, to transference and projection of memory, so only by accident has the human world any meaning.[5]

According to Merleau-Ponty, empiricists fail to note that we, in fact, perceive anger or pain in a face rather than remember the time when we too were feeling angry or hurt and had such a look on our face, etc. Merleau-Ponty objects to the idea that a meaning which we discern in a closed fist, for example, is inferred from introspection and memory, which is the only way empiricism can account for such significance. Instead, he claims that fear, anger, joy and the like are embodied in the look, in the shape of the eyebrows, mouth, etc. We do not infer the meaning of such expressions, we experience it "pre-critically," as it were. So the cultural or the "human world," as a basic given of our existence, is hidden from us by empiricism.

The "natural world" is also falsified by empiricism, according to Merleau-Ponty. As he puts it:

> ...the nature about which empiricism talks is a collection of stimuli and qualities, and it is ridiculous to pretend that nature thus conceived is, even in intention, merely the primary object of our perception.[6]

In empiricism, nature or the natural world is said to be experienced as a kind of scientific object. Nature, however, in actual experience is not made up of individual data or stimuli. If that were the case, our world would be full of gaps and unrelated impressions. In life we naturally fill in the gaps, even though we may not be receiving stimuli from them. Let me illustrate with an example. When we are looking at an object, let it be the tennis ball, we only actually see a part of it at any one time and from any one angle. Nevertheless, we experience the ball as a fully rounded object. Only in rare instances, as in a trick-shop window, for instance, might we not "see" the whole ball. As a matter of fact, the trick ball, being perhaps only a half-shell, works as a trick precisely and only because we initially experience it as a whole

ball. Therefore, in the natural world objects are not discovered and dealt with as so-called "scientific" objects. A newly born baby does not infer from memory that the nurturer's face is not a mask-like facade, but experiences it as a face full of meaning rather than stimuli.[7]

Merleau-Ponty makes the same point in relation to the "hidden" background in a painting,

> The phenomenon of the background's continuing under the figure, and being seen under the figure - when in fact it is covered by the figure - a phenomenon which embraces the whole problem of the presence of the object, is equally obscured by empiricism, which treats this covered part of the background as invisible.[8]

Therefore, our experience of our natural world is not made up on stimuli-like sensations, since we do in fact often perceive things from which we are not receiving any data. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> The hysterical child who turns around 'to see if the world behind him is still there' (Schaler, Idole der Selbsterkenntnis, p. 85) suffers from no deficiency of images, but the perceived world has lost for him that original structure that ensures that for the normal person its hidden aspects are as indubitable as are its visible ones.[9]

Mary Rose Barral summarizes Merleau-Ponty's critique of empiricism very well in the following paragraph:

> ...empiricism is a prolongation of the naive, realistic approach to reality, a sort of systematization of that external reality which the common man asserts, with which one communicates only through the senses, exteriorly... the world is a reality in itself, ruled by certain laws, having certain properties independent of the subject experiencing it... to empiricism the fundamental element for the description of the phenomena is lacking: that of the indissoluable union between subject and the world from which meaning derives.[10]

According to Merleau-Ponty, empiricism is not the only epistemological tradition which has crucial difficulties.

Rationalism, or what he calls "intellectualism," is also seen as wrong-headed. He puts it this way:

> Both empiricism and rationalism take the objective world as the object of their analysis, when this comes first neither in time nor in virtue of its meaning; and both are incapable of expressing the peculiar way in which the perceptual consciousness constitutes its object. Both keep their distance in relation to perception, instead of sticking closely to it.[11]

Neither empiricism nor rationalism takes the actual structure of perception seriously enough. Both keep it at a distance, as an "objective" transaction. Rationalism, in fact, does not take perception seriously at all, because for it all objects of knowledge are in the mind as ideas. For some rationalists, like Plato, sense perception serves only as an occasion for the "recollection" of pre-existent knowledge of eternal ideas. Consider, for example, the slave boy in the Meno, whose recollection of geometrical truth was merely triggered by Socrates' questions and figures drawn in the sand.

The main problem with rationalism, according to Merleau-Ponty, is this very pre-existence of knowledge, whether in the world of "Forms" or simply in Cartesian innate ideas. The intellectualist views the mind as "over-enriched," whereas the empiricist viewed it as empty or "under-enriched." Merleau-Ponty puts it in the following manner:

> Where empiricism was deficient was in any connection between the object and the act which it triggers off. What intellectualism lacks is contingency in the occasions of thought. In the first case consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appear compelling to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally we should not be searching.[12]

Thus, even the intellectualist must search for knowledge. In addition, if the basic objects of knowledge are in the mind as innate or pre-existent ideas, there ought to be no possibility of error. However, since our claims to knowledge are not incorrigible, there must be something missing from the rationalist account. Discovery and error, then, become the chief stumbling blocks for an intellectualist account of human knowledge. As Mallin writes:

> ...this ego cannot make mistakes or be fpoled by illusions or falsehoods, for its experiences have the clarity of ideas and can thus be exhaustively thematized and grasped by means of cognitive categories. Merleau-Ponty frequently criticizes this theory both because it makes illusion and error impossible, and thus equates appearance and reality, and because there is nothing in our experience that corresponds to such immanent, apodictic, or "absolute evidence."[13]

If empiricism fails, according to Merleau-Ponty, because it does not leave room for any reflection about our sensations, merely associating them as they come, intellectualism fails because its reflections are devoid of any sensations. Merleau-Ponty seems to agree with Kant when it comes to empiricism and rationalism; one is blind because its "percepts" have no guiding reflection and the other is empty because its "concepts" have nothing on which to reflect.

Another problem, according to Merleau-Ponty, with both empiricism and rationalism lies in their relationship to the object of knowledge, more specifically in the production of that which is known. As he himself states it:

> ...the two doctrines, then, have this idea in common that attention creates nothing, since a world of impressions in itself or a universe of determining thought are equally independent of the action of mind.[14]

Although at first it would seem that intellectualism could not be

guilty of considering the mind as merely passive, since the objects of thought are innately in the mind and are therefore known by the mind itself, the mind is not, in Merleau-Ponty's view, actively involved with the ideas. The attention of the mind is more like a search light which passively shines upon anything that falls in its predetermined path. The light of the mind, according to intellectualism, cannot stop and consider a given object of thought, or go back to a previous one out of interest. Attention thus understood cannot discriminate and choose among its objects.

> Consciousness is no less intimately linked with objects of which it is unheeding than with those which interest it, and the additional clearness brought by the act of attention does not herald any new relationship. It therefore becomes once more a light which does not change its character with the various objects which it shines upon...[15]

In intellectualism, 'judgment' is brought in to make perception possible. Perception is not possible on the basis of sensations alone, since one needs something with which to interpret the stimuli. As Descartes said when he looked out the window on the people walking along with hats on their heads: "...what do I see from the window, except hats and coats which may cover ghosts or dummies worked by springs? Yet I judge them to be real men."[16] In the same way, according to the intellectualist perspective, when we see a stick half submerged in water, it looks bent but we judge it to be straight. Thus, what we perceive often differs from how we judge it. Perception ends where judgment begins. It is with this point that Merleau-Ponty disagrees.

> The result is that intellectualist analysis eventually makes nonsense of the perceptual phenomena which it is

> designed to elucidate. While judgment loses its constitutive function and becomes an explanatory principle, the words 'see,' 'hear,' and 'feel' lost all their meaning, since the least significant vision outruns the pure impression and thus comes under the general heading of 'judgment.'[17]

Merleau-Ponty maintains that perception and judgment are very intimately connected. With respect to the stick which is set to look bent in water, actually we experience the stick as being straight because we have no other sense perceptions of it that guide us in placing the sensation we are presently receiving.[18] Thus a combination of sensations enables us to judge in a certain way. Judgment is, therefore, not separate from perception, but is a dimension of it. Our intellectual capacities do not, after all, arise out of or take place within a vacuum. Intellectualism fails to acknowledge that reflection grows out of a world which is "already there." Sallis states this point in the following fashion:

> The philosophy of reflection fails to take account of our "natural bond" with the world, of that intrinsically opaque link to thing which is already established when reflection comes upon the scene... What is required is a reflection which proceeds in full recognition of the fact that it takes place only within the compass of an always already constituted presence to the world.[19]

In spite of the fact that Immanuel Kant's epistemology was offered and is often taken as a way of overcoming the empiricist-rationalist standoff, from Merleau-Ponty's perspective it, too, fails to resolve the difficulties inherent in the subject-object dichotomy. Mind, in Kant's view, although equipped with the intuitions of space and time which organize the sensory manifold of experience, and the categories of the understanding which structure our conceptual experience, still functions in an essentially passive manner. For Kant the knowing subject is not actively <u>seeking</u>

knowledge, is not searching. Space, time, and causation, along with the other aspects of our cognitive scaffolding, remain abstract concepts rather than functioning relationally and inter-dependently with the known. Kant fails to pay attention to the act or process of knowing itself. Even a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism fails to "attach due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still empty but already determinate intention which is attention itself."[20]

In his Critique of Pure Reason Kant attempted to bring the knowing mind and the known world closer together than they had been in either empiricism or rationalism. Nevertheless, Kant's subject is not in a constructive relationship with the object of knowledge. As Merleau-Ponty says: "Kant detached the subject, or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it."[21] Furthermore, the world for Merleau-Ponty is "always already there," it is "lived," while for Kant it is not. Kant tried to bring the subject and object of knowledge into a closer relationship, but only succeeded in unifying the subject within itself. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> What distinguishes intentionality from the Kantian relation to a possible object is that the unity of the world...is lived as ready-made or already made. Kant himself shows in the Critique of Judgment that there exists a unity of the imagination and the understanding and a unity of subjects before the object...[22]

A distance remains between the knower and the known in Kant's epistemology, especially as found in his first Critique, since the known object is regarded as independently real. In other words, it is understood as existing on its own prior to its involvement with

the knowing subject. The object, as a thing-in-itself, has reality and identity completely outside of a relationship with any subject. Therefore, the two, the world and the subject are separated and the possibility, indeed, the necessity, of a dichotomy remains. As Mallin remarks:

> Although Kant gives us a better understanding of the unity of the subject and the world by making the function of subjectivity transcendental, both he and Husserl are also criticized for taking as real the multiplicity that is outside the consciousness.[2]3

We shall see later on that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in general, and in his epistemology in particular, "relationality" is the crucial notion. The knower and the known get their identity and reality from each other. That is to say, each is what it is because of its relationship to the other. This is the reason that Merleau-Ponty is critical of Kant's assumption that the noumenal world, which exists independently of a perceiving or knowing subject, can be conceived of as independently real. If this were the case, the thing-in-itself could not be conceived of at all.

In conclusion, Merleau-Ponty is dissatisfied with the empiricism because it does not leave room for any critical reflection with respect to the clustering of sense data, and he is dissatisfied with rationalism because it leaves no room for anything other than such reflection. Nor does intellectualism allow for our pre-reflective awareness of the world as lived and already there. Kant, in turn, is criticized by Merleau-Ponty for not taking into account the world as primordial to all analysis. In addition, he is chastized for failing to provide a true synthesis of empiricism and intellectualism. According to Merleau-Ponty, Kant cannot regard the noumena as

independently real and at the same time claim to have bridged the gap between the knower and the known. By maintaining the former he undercuts the latter.

The main difficulty, then, with all of these traditional epistemologies is their failure to posit or arrive at an inter-dependent relationship between the knower and the known predicated on a view of the knowing subject as <u>active</u>. In Merleau-Ponty's epistemology, however, the knowing subject is an active, intentional, meaning-seeking <u>body</u>. Let us now look more closely at the role of the body in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, with an eye to seeing how it claims to overcome the epistemic gap between the knower and the known.

2. A Philosophy of the Body

There are five main points in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the role of the body which seem to me to pertain directly to the topic of the subject-object dichotomy in epistemology. They are: (1) the body as an _object_ in the world, (2) the body as a _subject_, (3) the _spatiality_ and (4) the _motility_ of one's own body, and (5) the _synthesis_ of one's own body.

(1) At one point Merleau-Ponty focuses the prevailing view of the body in the following fashion:

> The definition of the object is... that it exists _partes extra partes_, and that consequently it acknowledges between its parts, or between itself and other objects, only external and mechanical relationships.[24]

This is how modern physiology understands our bodies. It has a very mechanistic view, regarding the human body as simply another, though highly complex machine. As far as mechanistic physiology is concerned, a person losing a part of her body is comparable to a car, for example, losing a tire. A person without a leg is simply that, an object without one of its parts. However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, there is a phenomenon called the "phantom-leg syndrome." In certain instances a person who has lost a leg nevertheless continues to experience the non-existent leg. I have a friend who lost both of his legs in the Finno-Russo war and now has artificial legs. According to a mechanistic physiology, he ought not now have any sensation in his legs because they are not there. However, he often gets, for example, an itch on his knee; that is to say, his non-existent knee itches. This feeling in a phantom limb is not explainable according to a mechanistic model of the human body,

because we ought not feel things in limbs which do not exist.

This feeling in a phantom limb cannot be explained on the basis of a simple stimulus-response mechanism, since there are no nerve impulses coming to the brain from the leg in question. Therefore, the brain itself is a far deeper organic entity than a purely psychological model will allow. At the opposite extreme, Merleau-Ponty gives the example of someone being stimulated but ceasing to have a sensation of it. A person's skin may be repeatedly touched by a hair, for example, until the localization becomes less and less precise and the hair is felt as touching a much broader area. Then the feeling is experienced as alternatively hot and cold. Later the person thinks the stimulus is being moved around and finally nothing at all is felt.[25] Such examples seem to indicate that there are instances in which the body does not function in a strictly mechanistic manner. Certain stimuli do not always create a specific brain sensation and, vice versa, sometimes sensations are felt without the corresponding stimulus.

Naturally, now, one is led to think that if a mechanistic physiology cannot explain the phantom limb phenomenon, perhaps a purely mentalistic psychology ought to be able to do so. Mentalism would maintain that a person may experience pains, itches, etc. in a lost limb because of an erroneous belief, a memory-image, or simply a refusal to accept the loss of a limb. Such explanations are not sufficient, however, because if one were to cut the appropriate nerves in the brain, the phantom limb experiences would cease. "But no psychological explanation can overlook the fact that the severance of the nerves to the brain abolishes the phantom limb."[26] Therefore,

Merleau-Ponty concludes that the explanation of the phantom limb phenomenon must lie somewhere between, or in a combination of, physiology and psychology.

> In order to describe the belief in the phantom limb and the unwillingness to accept mutilation, writers speak of a 'driving into the unconsciousness' or 'organic repression.' These un-Cartesian terms force us to form the idea of an organic thought through which the relation of the 'psychic' to the 'physiological' becomes conceivable.[27]

The phenomenon of the phantom limb makes clear the uniqueness of the human body when one is discussing it as an object in the world. It is not altogether like other objects, it is not simply an object among other objects. However, as we saw above, it is not exclusively a mental entity either. So, the human body is in fact an object, but a unique one, in so far as it functions as a living, relational axis for human experience.

> It is by abandoning the body as an object partes extra partes, and going back to the body which I experience at this moment, in the manner, for example, in which my hand moves round the object it touches, anticipating the stimuli and itself tracing out the form which I am about to perceive. I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises toward the world.[28]

The relationship between the psychical and the physiological in the human body is more complex than one might think initially. Traditionally the relationship of the soul to the body has been regarded quite mechanistically or quite dualistically; what is body is not soul and vice versa. As Zaner notes:

> Once one accepts such a dualism, he is faced with the insoluble problem of reestablishing the principle of connection between these two essentially different substances, and he must either reduce mind to matter, or matter to mind.[29]

As a result of this separation the functions of each dimension of

human experience have been separated as well. In either case, with respect to knowledge, the role of the body has been essentially ignored, with mechanists denying the very possibility of knowledge as more than the conditioning of a complex machine and dualists limiting knowledge to the mind as separate from the body. In Merleau-Ponty's epistemology these views of the human body are both rejected.

> Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts... The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree.[30]

In his last and unfinished work, The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty refers to the relationship between mind and body in the following way:

> Define the mind as the other side of the body - we have no idea of a mind that would not be doubled with a body, that would not be established on this ground - The 'other' side means that the body ...is not describable in objective terms, in terms of the in-itself - that this other side is really the other side of the body, overflows into it (Uberschreiten), encroaches upon it, is hidden in it - at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is anchored in it.[31]

It is clear that in the thought of Merleau-Ponty the body is not an object like other objects in the world. Also, the relationship between the mind and the body, is not that of separation as in the thought of Descartes, for example, but is rather a relationship of dimensionality. The one dimension is inextricably intertwined within the other in an organic manner. The mind and the body are like two poles of a magnetic field; each gets its reality and identity from the other. Because the body can never exist apart from the mind, it can never be thought of as an object among other objects in the world.

(2) The other side of this point that the body is not merely another object in the world is that of the body as subject. Each person experiences his or her own body differently from other bodies and/or objects in the world. This uniqueness of the body as subject is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the knower and the known. Moreover, as will be pointed out later on in this study, our knowledge of ourselves as <u>embodied subjects</u> is for Merleau-Ponty the paradigm case for knowing in general. Let us begin by examining a person's relationship to their own body more closely; what are the aspects that make it unique and so very important epistemologically?

First of all, one can never get away from one's own body. There is a certain kind of permanence of my body. Barral says this about it: "The body is therefore not as any other object, but one which has the particularity of being always available to me - always present. Its permanency is absolute inasmuch as it serves as a foundation for the relative permanence of objects."[32] I can walk away from every other object in the entire world, but not from my own body, thus it is questionable whether one's own body can be called an

In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty one can never step behind

oneself or in front of oneself to look at one's self from a fresh angle. We normally experience ourselves, as well as the world, vectorially or from the "inside out," as it were.

A dualist might object at this point and say that one "steps back" from oneself quite frequently, as when we observe ourselves behaving or thinking about our own thoughts. The problem with this objection is that it fails to acknowledge that even such acts of so-called "self-transcendence" are predicated on the unity of the self which is performing these acts. It is the full self, not just the mind, which intends and engages the world, even when one is involved in self-reflection. The mistake here is similar to that of concluding that since either pole of a magnetic field can be designated independently of the other, each can exist apart from the other. Nothing could be further from the truth.

For Merleau-Ponty the body is the axis from which I experience other bodies. The permanence of my body "is not a permanence in the world, but a permanence from my point of view."[34] I cannot have more than one point of view at any one moment because my kinaesthetic perspective stems from my position in the world. This perspective is dependent on where my body is, where I am. My body, in other words, is always the vantage point from which I experience others and the world. "Here" is always where my body is and I am always "here."

Another aspect of the uniqueness of my experience of my own body has to do with what Merleau-Ponty calls "double sensations." I have

at the same time both of my hands are subjects and objects of touching. Each hand is at once both touching and being touched. (The same can perhaps be said about seeing if I am looking at myself in a mirror, or when looking into the eyes of another person. I can be said to be seeing and to be seen simultaneously.) This is now Merleau-Ponty puts it:

> When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of 'touching' and being 'touched' ...I can identify the hand touched as the same one which will in a moment be touching.[35]

I think Merleau-Ponty's language is a bit too loose when he says that the "hands...alternate the roles of 'touching' and being 'touched.'" It seems to me that, although I can alternate the <u>focus</u> of my attention from one hand being the subject and the other being the object, neither one of them can <u>absolutely</u> become the subject and cease being the object of touching, since if this were possible the "object" hand would become just another object in the world, along with others. This is precisely what, according to Merleau-Ponty, a human body cannot be and remain a human body. This is the very point of the phenomenon of double sensation. Therefore, perhaps it would be most helpful for the making of an overall point to stress the <u>simutlaneous</u> character of the act of touching ourselves, without reducing the subject to the object or vice versa.

Next, my body is said to be "<u>an affective object</u>, whereas external things are from my point of view merely represented."[36] What is meant by this is that if I, for example, have a headache, it means that my head hurts, without my head being the <u>cause</u>, as it were, of my pain.

> For if I say that my foot hurts, I do not simply mean that it is a cause of pain in the same way as the nail, which is cutting into it, differing only in being nearer to me...[37]

Having a pain in my head or my foot could be explained by relating it to the foregoing discussion of double sensations. In a somewhat similar way as my hands are touching and being touched at the same time, when they are touching each other, also my head or foot is affecting pain and is affected by pain at the same time.

A final unique characteristic of experiencing my body as subject has to do with what are called "kinaesthetic sensations." This phenomenon could perhaps be referred to as the "sixth sense," i.e. the sense of movement. I move my body differently from how I move other things <u>with</u> my body. I raise my arm directly, I do not raise it by means of something else. My body, again, is at the same time both the subject and the object of my movement. If I move this pen on this paper with my hand, I can distinguish the object of movement, the pen, from the subject of movement, me, because they are separate from each other. This is not possible with respect to the movement of my hand itself, however, because here the subject and object are one. One could perhaps say that in this latter instance there is no object of movement, but it still makes sense to say that my hand is moving.

> I move external objects with the aid of my body, which takes hold of them in one place and shifts them to another. But my body itself I move directly, I do not find it at one point of objective space and transfer it to another, I have no need to look for it, it is already with me -- I do not need to lead it towards the movement's completion, it is in contact with it from the start and propels itself towards an end. The relationship between my decision and my body are, in movement, magic ones.[38]

As these four above characteristics illustrate, my experience of

my body is quite different from my experience of other bodies. The permanence of my body, the phenomenon of double sensations, my body as an affective object, and kinaesthetic sensations all make it clear that my relationship to my own body is unique. In fact, one might argue that this relationship is so different from any other relationship that it should not be called a relationship at all. For in a relationship commonly so called, at least two entities are necessary, but I and my body are really only one, and significantly so.

(3) Let us now move on to the third major aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body and its bearing on the relationship of the knower to the known. This aspect pertains to the spatiality of one's own body, to its locality or "whereness." The "where" of my body is clearly different from that of any other thing in the world.

> If my arm is resting on the table I should never think of saying that it is beside the ashtray in the same way as the ashtray is beside the telephone.[39]

The image one gets from the expression "My arm is beside the ashtray" is one of an artificial arm, an object among other objects. The location of a real, organic arm need not, indeed cannot, be given in the above way, because a person knows where his or her arm is in relation to one's own body, to oneself, from the "inside," so to speak. "I am in undivided possession of [my body] and I know where each of my limbs is through a <u>body image</u> in which all are included."[40] This body image may include, in addition to an awareness of the location of one's limit, an awareness of a limb which is no longer present, as we have seen above. This is what Bannan says about the body image:

> Merleau-Ponty demonstrated that the parts of the body are not simply "outside of parts" as the traditional definition of objective space would have it, but that they mutually imply each other because of their integration in a single form. Because of such a form, which Merleau-Ponty now refers to as body image, I have an undivided possession of the parts of my body, for the image envelopes them.[41]

The unique spatiality of one's own body can perhaps be clarified by referring once again to the concept of "here." There is no such thing as an objective "here;" here is always where I am. The location of my body defines where "here" is, it is the axis of my entire existence and experience.

> The world 'here' applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in the face of its task.[42]

In other words, with respect to my experience of the world, space is not an objective, abstract reality or concept. On the contrary, space is essentially relational and is known in and through the body. The "here" is a space only in relation to me. Also, it is from this "here" that other space becomes meaningful, in fact becomes real space at all. As Bannan notes: "...the body has that most objective of all characteristics - deployment in space...due to the body as subject...Just as I am not an object because I am the condition for there being objects, so also I am not in space because I am the source of space."[43]

Merleau-Ponty speaks of the "point-horizon" structure as the foundation of the notion and reality of space."[44] The point is my bodily space, it is the here where my body is. The horizon, on the other hand, is external space, which circumscribes the point. The point, the here, is wherever I stand and the horizon is the limit of

my vision and my movement. The point and the horizon then make up my spatial world. Furthermore, as I move and thus the point moves, so also moves the horizon. Therefore, I can never leave my "here" and can never get to where the horizon was, it has moved away and I am once again at my point.

It is difficult to talk about spatiality without talking at the same time about motility, as the above discussion clearly illustrates. This is especially significant for the subject-object dichotomy, since it underlines the inherent relationality of our embodied existence, and hence all of our knowledge as well.

(4) It is in space that we move, and space becomes space for us as we move. As Merleau-Ponty says:

> It is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being, and an analysis of one's own movement should enable us to arrive at a better understanding of it. By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space... because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assures them, it takes them up in their basic significance, which is obscured in the commonplaces of establishing situations.[45]

Let us then examine the notion of motility in more detail. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy there are two types of movements. These are: concrete movement and abstract movement. To a large degree these two movements correspond to the two types of space which were discussed above. Concrete movement takes place in bodily space, while abstract movement happens in external, or perhaps objective space. Clearly, for Merleau-Ponty, the latter emerges or is derived from the former.

Schneider, a psychiatric patient to whom Merleau-Ponty refers a good deal,[46] is a person who can only perform concrete movements in

bodily space. He can make no abstract movements, such as pointing to a part of his body, with his eyes shut. His condition is called "psychic blindness." For Schneider there is no objective space and thus he cannot in any way think of his body as an object in the world. His body for him is pure subject. For instance, if Schneider gets an itch on some part of his body, he can find it and scratch it quite easily. If, however, he were asked to point to the spot where he was itching, he could not do so. Pointing would necessitate experiencing his body as an object in abstract space. Schneider

> does not need to look for the place where he has been stung. He finds it straightway, because for him there is no question of locating it in relation to axes of co-ordinates in objective space, but of reaching with his phenomenal hand a certain painful spot of his phenomenal body, and because between the hand as a scratching potentiality and the place stung as a spot to be scratched a directly experienced relationship is presented in the natural system of one's own body. The whole operation takes place in the domain of the phenomenal; it does not run through the objective world.[47]

It is possible for us normal people, too, to experience the difficulty of regarding our body as an object. Perhaps the following exercise will prove helpful: Extend your arms in front of you, cross them, and then interlace your fingers. Now, pull your hands close to your body so that you can see your interlaced fingers. Then ask a friend to point to one of your fingers without touching it. Now try to move the finger which has been pointed to. If, however, your friend will <u>touch</u> the finger, you will find that moving the proper finger is not difficult at all.

Schneider, or anyone who can only think of themselves as a subject in bodily space, can only perform concrete tasks of touching and grasping (<u>greifen</u>) and no abstract tasks of pointing (<u>zeigen</u>). <u>Greifen</u> is possible for Schneider not only through his own body, but

also with respect to other objects as well. For him, all other objects are tools in relation to concrete tasks and not something in and of themselves. A fork, for instance, is only relevant for Schneider when he is hungry and uses it to eat with. He would not understand an abstract description of a fork as an object in and of itself, where one might examine its sharpness, width, and shape.

From this study of Schneider Merleau-Ponty draws the conclusion that concrete movement and bodily space enjoy a privileged position in human experience and, therefore, also in human knowing. Concrete movement and bodily space are seen as primordial and out of them grow abstract movement and the experience of external, objective space. To put it more helpfully, perhaps, for Merleau-Ponty the latter are grounded in the former, since they could not be without the former, but the reverse is not true, as the case of Schneider makes clear.

> The light is thus thrown upon the distinction between abstract and concrete movement: the background to concrete movement is the world as given, whereas the background to abstract movement is built up... Concrete movement is therefore centripetal whereas abstract movement is centrifugal. The former occurs in the realm of being or of the actual, the latter on the other hand in that of the possible or non-existent; the first adheres to a given background, the second throws out its own background.[48]

This concrete movement, then, seems to be tactile in quality and is understood tacitly, whereas abstract movement is more "cognitive" (as this word is traditionally understood) or propositional in quality and is understood more explicitly. In traditional epistemology, concrete, tactile knowledge has been ignored because it cannot be articulated; it has been assumed that knowledge requires knowing that one knows, i.e. explicating exhaustively the reasons why one knows. Thus, abstract, propositional knowing, on the other hand, has been

taken as the only relevant factor in epistemology. What strikes me as crucial in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body is that he is shifting the axis of epistemology from the second-order movement and knowledge (the abstract) to the first-order or primordial level (the concrete). He is directing our attention away from the propositional or conceptual and towards the embodied. He claims that knowing is not limited to mental operations, but also includes, indeed requires as fundamental, bodily knowing.

> Beneath intelligence as beneath perception we discover a more fundamental function, a vector mobile in all directions like a searchlight, one through which we can direct ourselves towards anything, in or outside ourselves, and display a form of behavior in relation to that object.[49]

This fundamental function which anchors "cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life, is an intentional arch, which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility."[50] To use, and to transform, a familiar distinction among contemporary epistemologists, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy calls for knowing _that_ to be seen as parasitic on knowing _how_ (propositional knowledge as derivative in relation to experiential knowledge). It is as a body in space, or as a body which inhabits space, that we intend and encounter the world. It is as an embodied being that we seek and find meaning. Even a newly born baby comes into the world grasping (_greifen_) and taking hold of things; it comes expecting and intending meaning, without first getting clear about its concepts. This intentional activity is not arbitrary, as can be seen from the fact that even a ten day old baby will imitate a smile and the act of sticking out its tongue. Moreover, new born infants have been shown to be able to distinguish human faces from other figures and their

mother's face from other faces.

It is through movement in space, then, first greifen and then zeigen, that we seek and find meaning in the world.

> Already motility, in its pure state, possesses the basic power of giving a meaning (Sinngebung). Even if subsequently thought and the perception of space are freed from motility and spatial being, for us to be able to conceive space, it is in the first place necessary that we should have been thrust into it by our body, and that it should have provided us with the first model of those transpositions, equivalents and identifications which make space into an objective system and allow our experience to be one of objects, opening out on 'itself.'[51]

I mentioned earlier that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body places bodily knowing at the center of all knowing, including intellectual or conceptual knowing. Let us look more closely at what he means by knowing with one's own body. Most of us have experienced the difficulty of driving a car which has a different type of transmission from the one we are used to. It is so easy to forget, for example, that you are now operating a car without a clutch and to push down the brake pedal with your left foot. Your knowledge of how to drive your own car is so much in your body that even a mental effort does not always enable you to overcome it. Also, when a blind person walks down a street using her stick to guide her, the stick is not a mere object in her hand but has become an extension of her body, has become a part of her body. If the blind person were to pick up a stick that was longer than the one she usually used, she would not come to know its different length by measuring it, etc., but by using it to poke and touch things with. She would indwell the stick by using it in the world, and the world through the stick.

In the same way, a dancer learns to dance a particular dance. he does not first learn a formula for the dance, but rather he starts

dancing. He begins to move his body and slowly his body comes to know the dance. This same pattern holds true for those learning to play a musical instrument. When, for example, an experienced organist is about to perform on an unfamiliar instrument with only a short time in which to practice,

> Are we to maintain that the organist analyzes the organ, that he conjures up and retains a representation of the stops, pedals and manuals and their relation to each other in space? But during the short rehearsals preceding the concert, he does not act like a person about to draw up a plan. He sits on the seat, works the pedals, pulls out the stops, gets the measure of the instrument with his body, incorporates within himself the relevant directions and dimensions, settles into the organ as one settles into a house.[52]

In the above examples of knowing one's body, the body as <u>expressive space</u> has come to the fore. It is in and through this bodily space that intentions and meanings are expressed. Therefore, bodily space, where concrete movements are performed, is not empty, mute, static, or natural as is objective space. Rather, it is that through which meaning arises.

> The body is our general medium for having a world... We say that the body has understood and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning, and assimilated a fresh core of significance... Bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning which is not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, a meaning which clings to certain contents. My body is that meaningful core which behaves like a general function, and which nevertheless exists, and is susceptible to disease.[53]

This discussion of the motility of the body, and of its crucial role in our knowledge of the world, carries with it important implications for the subject-object dichotomy which shall be taken up in the final section of this paper.

(5) The final point of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy which pertains to our examination of its relevance for the relation between the

knower and the known has to do with his concept of the synthesis of our own body. First of all, the spatiality of one's own body and the being of one's body are not two different things. They are not separable in experience, but are, rather, two aspects or dimensions of one reality. Space, for us, is rooted in being, and the body is of space, rather than merely in it. This difference becomes clear when we consider a person who, for example, regards their body or part of it as an external object. Thus a person whose arm has been mutilated may refuse to accept it as her arm. She knows where the "thing" which hangs from her shoulder is, but she does not experience it as part of her. Her healthy parts comprise her bodily space and she experiences them as subject, while the malformed arm is experienced as an object in external space. In short, the arm in question is not part of the woman's bodily space and thus is not part of her being. Therefore, one's being, one's self, and the space of one's body are in synthesis with each other; they may perhaps be distinguished from each other in reflective analysis, such as in the present case, but not in normal experience.

In one's body, with respect to all aspects of it and not only its spatiality, there is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a unique synthesis. One's body is unlike a machine where different parts are simply co-ordinated with each other. The various bodily parts, or better, dimensions, are in much greater organic unity than are the parts of a machine. The different dimensions of a human body and their function are, as it were, "superimposed" upon each other, they interpenetrate each other.

> The connecting link between the parts of our body and that between our visual and tactile experience are not forged

> gradually and cumulatively. I do not translate the 'data of touch' into the 'language of seeing' or vice versa - I do not bring together one by one the parts of my body; this transaction and this unification are performed once and for all within me: they are my body itself.[54]

The unity and synthesis of the different dimensions in a work of art provides an excellent model for understanding that of a living human body. As Bannan states:

> In an attempt to characterize the body more globally Merleau-Ponty seeks an expression that will signify it in its synthesis with consciousness. The unity of this synthesis is much too variable, subtle and flexible to be conveyed by any classic or otherwise established formulation. Merleau-Ponty proposes an analogy with another reality whose unity is highly mysterious but nonetheless unquestionable: the work of art.[55]

That which unites the various particulars comprising a painting, for instance, is not itself an identifiable or objectifiable entity which gets its reality and meaning exclusively from the parts. They, rather, get their significance from it, and are synthesized by means of it. So, too, and even more so, do the dimensions comprising the embodied existence of human beings obtain their reality and meaning by means of the synthesis which <u>is</u> the living, moving body. The meaning of a painting is <u>in</u> the painting, and although it cannot be talked about or experienced apart from the particulars which make it up, this meaning cannot be reduced to an analytic summary of those particulars. As Merleau-Ponty said: "The work of art begins to transmit an uninterrupted message. But the meaning of the work for the artist or for the public cannot be stated except by the work itself: neither the thought which created it nor the thought which receives it is completely its own master."[56]

Questions like: "<u>Where</u> is the meaning in the painting?," "Have you put the meaning into the painting yet?," and "Can you paint the

painting without the meaning? are, needless to say, bizarre. The meaning of a painting, like its harmony, vigor, sadness, and tension, is embodied in the work and is experienced in and through its particulars without being reducible to them. The particular shapes, colors, lines, etc. are so synthesized in the painting that they mediate its meaning to us. As Cezanne put it: "If I paint all the little blues and all the little maroons, I capture and convey his glance."[57] In like manner, Cezanne sought to paint a scene described by Balzac as a "tablecloth white as a layer of newly fallen snow, upon which the place-settings arise symmetrically, crowned with bread rolls." Cezanne, however, was not confident that he would be able to paint "crowned" and expressed his doubt in this fashion: "Now I know that one must will only to paint the place-settings rising symmetrically and the bread rolls. If I paint 'crowned' I've had it, you understand?"[58] Cezanne understood that the meaning, the expression of a painting cannot be detached from the particulars which embody it. One cannot have the parts of this individual painting apart from the painting itself; they become parts of this painting by participating in it. This is the sort of synthesis that Merleau-Ponty discerns amidst the various parts and functions of the human body. It constitutes their unity. He puts it this way:

> A novel, poem, picture, or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being mediated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. It is in this sense our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the function of a certain number of mutually variable terms.[59]

Now, let me summarize the foregoing points presented above in order to show how they bear on the problem of the knower and the

known. Let us take the five points as outlined and see how they might contribute to overcoming the epistemic gap between the subject and the object.

We do not experience our own body as an object among other objects in the world, unless a part of it is rejected for one reason or another. In a normal situation we do not, in fact we cannot, experience our own body as an object partes extra partes. In other words, a mechanistic understanding of our own body is neither helpful nor possible, given the realities of our bodily existence, except in such specialized contexts as medical diagnosis, etc. We experience our own bodies quite differently from the way we experience other bodies. We experience them as both subject and object, simultaneously, and the fact that, when we feel pain in our foot, the pain-giver and that which is in pain are one and the same, demonstrates that we know our own body because we are our body.

Subsequently, in talking or and understanding our body as both subject and object we see that the traditional epistemological distinction between the knowing subject and the known object does not apply. My body is an object in the world in some sense, but not as partes extra partes, and my body is a subject also, but not a disembodied one. The body, then, and our understanding of it, provides a point of departure for a fresh approach to the relationship between the knower and the known.

The spatiality of one's own body, too, is quite different from that of other things. The parts of my body are incorporated into my bodily space, which is not abstract, mute, or neutral, but which makes

up my very way of being in the world and my body image. Space, in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, has lost its "objective" character and has become relational instead. For example, this cup on the table is not a neutral object in abstract space, but it is a cup of mine in front of me in our camper and from which earlier I drank my coffee. The basic relationality of bodily space leaves no room for epistemic distance between the subject and the object, for it constitutes the two in relation to each other.

Motility in our bodies also expresses our relationality with ourselves and with the world. Concrete bodily movement is our foothold from which all our efforts at meaning and knowledge achievement make their initial departure. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty prefers the phrase, 'I can,' to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am."[60]

It is as moving bodies <u>of</u> space that we move <u>in</u> space; t is as embodied and moving that we <u>accomplish</u> knowledge. The relationship of our body parts and functions to each other is crucial to the possibility of overcoming the subject-object dichotomy if the knowledge of ourselves as embodied beings is to serve as the paradigm for all knowing. The parts and functions of our body must be understood as inherently and integrally one in order for the epistemic gap to be eliminated.

The major point here is that the human body, in not being made up of parts which are related to each other objectively or externally, does not exist in abstract space, but is in <u>inextricable relation</u> to and with itself in its own space, and with its surroundings as well as by virtue of its motility. Furthermore, other bodies and persons

do not exist "out there" as objects in abstract space, on the far side of the epistemig gap, but they exist in relation to me and each other as I and they interact with one another in common, relational space. We gain our individuality from each other reciprocally. This reciprocity might be more clearly understood if one thinks of subjects and objects again as two poles in a common electromagnetic field. The positive and negative poles get their reality and identity from each other; when one ceases to exist, so also does the other. They can be talked about separately, but they can neither exist nor be experienced apart from each other. In the same way, it seems to me that Merleau-Ponty is saying that it is best to think about the relationship between the knower and the known as symbiotic in character. The knower is a knower only in relation to that which is known; and the known is the known only in relation to a knower. Both get their significance from the other.

3. A Philosophy of Language

In the previous section we have seen how bodily activity expresses our intentions and meanings. One form of bodily activity is, of course, linguistic behavior. Language as a bodily activity can, according to Merleau-Ponty, be viewed as a connecting link between the knowing subject and the known object, as a way of overcoming the traditional yet problematic dichotomy that is the focus of this present thesis. It is essential to have a handle on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language in order to understand this connecting link. For the purposes of this present study it may prove helpful to think of language in relation to the following three dimensions of experience: thought, the world, and the body. Let us now see if and how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language will contribute to the resolution of the problem of the epistemic gap. Merleau-Ponty himself is quite direct about it. He says: "In trying to describe the phenomenon of speech and the specific act of meaning, we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy.[61]

How are language and thought related to each other? Very intimately, according to Merleau-Ponty; there is no thought apart from language. Language is the incarnation of thought and neither has significance apart from the other. In some theories of language, thought is said to exist before, and thus independently of, speech. In such views one can have thoughts without words as well as thoughts with words. Merleau-Ponty disagrees and says: "A thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and

communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist, even for itself."[62] We do not first have a concept in our mind and then put it into words.

> When i fix my eyes on an object in the half-light, and say: 'It is a brush,' there is not in my mind the concept of a brush, under which i subsume the object and which moreover is linked by frequent association with the word 'brush,' but the word bears the meaning, and by imposing it on the object, i am conscious of reaching that object.[63]

Thus Merleau-Ponty says that "speech...does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it."[64] The meaning of a sentence, then, is not distinct from the words, for the words embody the meaning. In the same way as one does not have pre-existing thoughts prior to language, one does not have meaning prior to language. Thought and meaning are embodied, incarnated in language in a way similar to the way a glance was said by Cezanne to be embodied in the colors of a portrait painting. Here is what Sallis says about Merleau-Ponty's view of the relationship between thought and speech:

> An idea...comes into my possession only by means of an act of expression in which I make it dwell in my language: 'I say that a signification is acquired and henceforth available when I have succeeded in making it dwell in a speech apparatus.' (Signs, 91). Thought terminates in speech; 'one does not know what one says, one knows after having said.'[65]

Interestingly enough, the passage that Sallis quotes in the above quotation shows that Merleau-Ponty agreed with this point as late as 1960, when he wrote Signs.

If one only knows what one says after saying it, it makes no sense to speak as if the meaning of an utterance could be known apart from the utterance. Merleau-Ponty remarks: "The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought."[66] Even now as I am writing these sentences, I do not have

wordless thoughts about and prior to what I am writing. My thoughts are opening up onto the paper as I write. It is the same way with speech; it is possible to begin a sentence without any idea of what the last word of the sentence will be. Under normal circumstances we work our thoughts out as we go.

> ...speech is not the 'sign' of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon which heralds another as smoke betrays fire. Speech and thought would admit of this external relation only if they were both thematically given, whereas in fact they are intervolved, the sense being held within the word, and the word being the external existence of the sense.[67]

This integral relationship between language and thought, or meaning, is similar to that between melody and notes in a musical piece. Without the notes there would be no music. It is impossible even to hum a melody silently without embodying the hum in notes; not, of course, in written symbols, but in the actual musical notes themselves. In other words, a song can only exist in one's mind as a musical piece; if it is not embodied in notes and melody then it simply does not exist. Similarly with language and thought, the latter is in reality a silent form of the former. As Merleau-Ponty says: "This...silence is alive with words, this inner life is an inner language."[68]

Now that we have some idea of how Merleau-Ponty understands the relationship between language and thought, let us see how he treats that between language and the world. First of all, he rejects the so-called "picture theory" of language in which words are regarded as univocal signs or labels for states of affairs. He says: "What the normal person possesses is not a stock of words, but a certain way of using them."[69] Further on he continues: "And as, in a foreign

country, I begin to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life..."[70] The use of words, then, is the key notion here. Merleau-Ponty would agree with ordinary language philosophers when they maintain that meaning is a function of use in context. Through regular usage in continuously overlapping contexts utterances acquire a meaning, a "sedimentation," which though relatively stable continues to shift as the purposes and consequences of their use evolve.[71] As Mallin puts it: "Merleau-Ponty agrees with ordinary language philosophy that linguistic meaning is not self-subsistent, and that if it can be found anywhere it is to be found in language's use."[72]

So one does not, according to Merleau-Ponty, have a storage-bag full of words that exist independently of the objects which they name, pulling out the appropriate word-tags whenever need be. On the contrary, there is an integral and inextricable organic relationship between words and the world. Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to claim that language participates in and helps to constitute the world. He expresses this dynamic constitutive in the following manner: "For pre-scientific thinking, naming an object is causing it to exist or changing it: God creates beings by naming them and magic operates upon them by speaking of them."[73]

Naturally, we do not create things in the world ex nihilo by means of speech. Yet there seems to be some sense in which it is proper to say that our reality is linguistically constituted. It is common knowledge, for example, that if a child is called a "slow learner" from a very young age on, she may well in fact become a slow

learner, even though she possesses an average ability. Again, if a grown up woman or man is continually referred to as a "girl" or "boy" respectively, they may actually behave in ways appropriate to such designations. Remy Kwant makes Merleau-Ponty's point quite clear: "The 'word' does not point to a reality already existing for us before it was named, but on the contrary it makes this reality exist for us."[74] Therefore, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the use of language to a large degree creates and alters our lived reality.

It also seems to be the case that a particular aspect of reality calls for certain linguistic usage. For example, Eskimoes have over thirty different terms for designating different kinds of snow and no word for snow in general. We only have a few words for distinguishing different kinds of snow conditions. The Eskimoes' environment and life style call for more names for snow and therefore there <u>are</u> more kinds of snow for them. Thus there is a symbiotic relationship between reality and language, they affect each other. Language develops through use in relation to particular aspects of the world, while the world is "seen as" or experienced as different as a result of language. It is time to turn our attention to the relationship between language and the body in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

The relationship between language and the body in Merleau-Ponty's thought is as important as it is intimate. In fact, for the purposes of the present study this relationship is clearly the most important of all. It is this relationship which gives clues as to the acquisition and thus the origin of speech. For Merleau-Ponty, language grows out of our bodily existence. For clarity's sake it is helpful at this stage of our discussion to introduce a distinction

which Merleau-Ponty makes in the Phenomenology of Perception[75] between two types of language. One he calls "speech" (la parole), and the other "language" (la langue). The former is the expression of the child who names an object for the first time, or of the artist who gives expression to an original meaning. Both create through speech. Speech, then, is the authentic or primordial form of expression; it is the "word in the speaking" where meaning is formulated for the first time. Language, on the other hand, is established or instituted speech, it is the "spoken word." Language names objects according to their sedimented meanings. It is the empirical form of expression because "its words and expressions have become stereotyped by usage,"[76] to use Barral's phrase.

Furthermore, language grows out of speech.[77] An artist, child, philosopher, or scientist names an aspect of reality for the first time, perhaps by means of a metaphor, such as referring to the base of a mountain as its "foot." Through continued use the words of authentic speech become part of everyday, empirical language. The original insight has become a sedimented expression in common usage. Here is how Merleau-Ponty explains the relationship between speech and language:

> Languages or constituted systems of vocabulary and syntax, empirically existing 'means of expression' are both repository and residue of acts of speech, in which unformulated significance not only finds the means of being conveyed outwardly, but moreover acquires existence for itself, and is genuinely created as significance.[78]

Therefore, the spoken word owes its existence, not to any external, ready-made definition or meaning, but to the word in speaking, to the act of speech itself.

A question arises, however: "How does speech as a mode of

expression come to exist?" At this juncture it is helpful to introduce Merleau-Ponty's notion of speech as gesture. Speech, in one sense, grows out of silence, but not from an unexpressive and mute silence. Rather, it springs from the silence of gestural expression. In other words, before the child names an object for the first time, or the poet expresses what G. M. Hopkins termed an original "inscape," each in authentic speech, the body has already communicated without words. We often speak today of "body language," meaning that a person's posture and movements transmit a great deal of nonverbal meaning. Sometimes, in fact, a person's body language communicates more, and more deeply or truely, than do the spoken words.

There is, then, meaning in our gestures. How is this meaning in our gestures and how is it discerned? According to Merleau-Ponty, the gestures and postures embody their meaning. Anger, for instance, is actually in the clenched fist. We do not infer that a person is angry because we remember that we, too, clenched our fists when we were angry. No, for Merleau-Ponty, the clenched fist both is and communicates anger. "I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself."[79]

The meaning of the gesture is in the gesture, embodied in it in the way "crowned" was embodied in the table setting which Cezanne hoped to paint, as we saw in a previous section. In other words, the meaning in a bodily gesture is not a separate, external and independent concept, but resides in and is mediated by the gesture itself. We understand other people's gestures, not by means of an inferential process, but because we are all embodied beings. We

humans are qualitatively alike. Because of our common embodied existence we stand in a unique relationship to each other. Here is Merleau-Ponty's explanation of our ability to understand each other's gestures:

> The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernable in the conduct of others. It is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body and mine his.[80]

Furthermore, language, which grows out of speech, which in turn grows out of bodily gestures, remains gestural. It does so <u>because</u> it grows out of and remains grounded in bodily expression. Therefore, the meaning is in language in the same way as meaning is in the gesture, namely as embodied. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "The spoken word is a genuine gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains it."[81] Thus the meaning of a word or gesture cannot be reduced to an account of the particulars comprising it, whether they be specific phonemes and grammatical patterns or positions and movements of limbs, etc. Even the actual physiological factors by means of which we produce the sounds comprising spoken language participate in and mediate the meaning which they serve to convey. They, too, function as bodily gestures which anchor linguistic meaning in the commonality of our shared physical and social existence. Merleau-Ponty describes the interconnections between such seemingly insignificant physical factors and linguistic meaning in the following fashion:

> Language, in its turn, presents no different a problem: a contraction of the throat, a sibilant emission of air between the tongue and the teeth, a certain way of bringing the body into play suddenly allows itself to be invested with a <u>figurative</u> <u>significance</u> which is conveyed outside us. This is neither more nor less miraculous than the emergence

> of love from desire, or that of gesture from the unco-ordinated movements of infancy.[82]

Let us now see how this view of language as an integral dimension of thought, world, and body can be of help in the task of overcoming the dichotomy between the knowing subject and the known object. We noted earlier in this section that thought and language can, in Merleau-Ponty's view, cannot exist separately, each receiving its significance in and through the other. We also saw that for Merleau-Ponty the world and language exist in a similar symbiotic relationship to each other. Moreover, we have come to see that language itself is part and parcel of embodied existence as mediated through gesture. Understanding language as gestural from start to finish, and as integrally connected with both thought and the world, provides a helpful axis around which to integrate the knower and the known, namely the body itself.

In traditional epistemologies, the knowing subject has generally been regarded as the mind alone, while the objects to be known have been separated from the knowing mind by the body, specifically the senses. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, however, thought is always in language, language is at least originally gestural and thus embodied, and therefore disembodied thought in the knower's mind is out of the question. Language, being inherently gestural, mediates our embodied existence. Thought, in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology, cannot be separated from the objects of knowledge because it is "grounded" in the body, which in turn is grounded in the world. Thought is "grounded" in the body in the following way. Thought is always embodied in language and language grows out of speech, which in turn grows out of bodily gestures, both kinaesthetic and tonal. Therefore,

thought is grounded in the body. Body, for its part, is grounded in the world, because it is of the world. Merleau-Ponty says that our bodies inhabit the world, and thus they belong to the world.

Although thought, language, the body, and the world are in some sense hierarchically related to each other, none is the cause of the others. They are, rather, dimensions of each other. Therefore, no gap between the knower and the known need or can arise in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is this symbiotic relationship between thought, language, the body, and the world that Merleau-Ponty had in mind when he promised that "we shall have the opportunity to leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy."[83]

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, tr. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

2. Ibid., p. 4.

3. Ibid., p. 15.

4. Ibid., p. 17.

5. Ibid., p. 23.

6. Ibid, p. 24.

7. Andrew N. Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, "Imitation of Facial and Manual Gestures by Human Neonates," Science, 198 (October 1977), pp. 75-78.

8. Ibid,, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 24.

9. Ibid., p. 25.

10. Mary Rose Barral, The Body in Interpersonal Relations (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), p. 75.

11. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 26.

12. Ibid., p. 28.

13. Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 201.

14. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 28.

15. Ibid., p. 28.

16. Rene Descartes, 2nd Meditation, AT, ix, p. 25.

17. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 34.

18. Ibid., pp. 374-375.

19. John Sallis, Phenomenology and The Return to Beginnings (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1973), p. 63.

20. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 28.

21. Ibid., p. ix.

22. Ibid., p. xviii.

23. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 103.

24. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 73.

25. Ibid., p. 75.

26. Ibid., p. 77. cf. Lhermitte, "L'Image de notre corps," Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1939, pp. 129-ff.

27. Ibid., p. 77.

28. Ibid., p. 75.

29. Richard Zaner, The Problem of Embodiment (The Hague: Martinus Nighoff,1964), p. 243.

30. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 88-89.

31. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 259.

32. Ibid., The Body in Interpersonal Relations, p. 133.

33. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 90.

34. Ibid., p. 90.

35. Ibid., p. 93.

36. Ibid., p. 93.

37. Ibid., p. 93.

38. Ibid., p. 94.

39. Ibid., p. 98.

40. Ibid., p. 98.

41. John F. Bannan, The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1967), p. 69.

42. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 100.

43. Ibid., The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, p. 69.

44. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 102.

45. Ibid., p. 102.

46. Schneider is a psychiatric patient who suffers from psychic blindness. His is a case studied by Gelb and Goldstein. See Psychologische Analysen hirnpathologischer Falle (Leipzig: Barth, 1920), ch. 11.

47. Ibid., Phenomelogy of Perception, p. 105.

48. Ibid., p. 111.

49. Ibid., p. 135.

50. Ibid., p. 136.

51. Ibid., p. 142.

52. Ibid., p. 145.

53. Ibid., p. 147.

54. Ibid., p. 150.

55. Ibid., The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, p. 75.

56. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-sense (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), author's preface, p. 31.

57. As quoted by Merleau-Ponty in "Cezanne's Doubt," Sense and Non-sense, p. 16.

58. Ibid., p. 16.

59. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 151.

60. Ibid., p. 137.

61. Ibid., p. 174.

62. Ibid., p. 177.

63. Ibid., p. 177.

64. Ibid., p. 178.

65. Ibid., Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings, p. 100. The last line of this quotation is from La Prose du Monde (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 64.

66. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 180.

67. Ibid., p. 182.

68. Ibid., p. 183.

69. Ibid., p. 175.

70. Ibid., p. 179.

71. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "On the Phenomenology of Language," in Signs (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 89-92 and pp. 95-97.

72. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 186.

73. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 178.

74. Remy C. Kwant, Encounter (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1960), p. 37.

75. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 196-7.

76. Ibid., The Body in Interpersonal Relations, p. 176.

77. It needs to be noted that there are some problems about saying that language grows out of speech. Perhaps the most troublesome aspect has to do with the fact that language includes written text. Merleau-Ponty does not seem to take this into account. It is perhaps easier to understand that speech grows out of bodily gesture and spoken language is grounded in speech. It is more difficult, however, perhaps not impossible, to see how written language is rooted in spoken speech. Paul Ricoeur, among others, has wrestled with this issue. For further information see Paul Ricoeur, "New Developments in Phenomenology in France: The Phenomenology of Language," Social Research, 34 (Spring 1967): 1-30.

78. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 196-197.

79. Ibid., p. 184.

80. Ibid., p. 185.

81. Ibid., p. 183.

82. Ibid., p. 194.

83. Ibid., p. 174.

Chapter Two

Merleau-Ponty's Relational Epistemology

In Chapter One of the present study the focus was on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment. First his critique of empiricism, intellectualism, and Kant's epistemology was examined. Then his philosophy of the body, including his philosophy of language as gesture, was explicated. Now it is time to see how Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the roles of the body and language relate to three main epistemological categories: our knowledge of the world, other persons, and the self. It should be noted at this point that the order in which Merleau-Ponty deals with these categories is not the one traditionally used in modern philosophy, where one starts with the knowledge of the self, moves on to the knowledge of others, and finally arrives at the knowledge of the external world. Given that all three of these dimensions of knowledge and experience are for Merleau-Ponty, in a symbiotic relationship, each getting its significance from the others, the order of investigation does not seem to be of great importance. However, I shall follow Merleau-Ponty's order rather than the traditional one to avoid assumptions which might be implied by the latter order, namely that the knowledge of the self is primordial and the basis for the other kinds of knowledge. For Merleau-Ponty none of these three kinds of knowledge is primary nor prior to any other. One learns to know oneself in relation to the world and to other people, just as others and the world as well are known in relation to the self and each other. Therefore, no hierarchical order is implied by the sequence of the following discussion.

1. Our Knowledge of the World

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, what is often referred to by the misleading term of "external world" is known in relation to the embodied self and other embodied persons. Things do not exist independently in abstract space, as is the case in many other more traditional philosophies. As we noted in the second part of the first chapter, space is not an abstract reality for Merleau-Ponty. On the contrary, space <u>becomes</u> space as we interact and move within it. More pointedly, we know where our body is and in what position our limbs are without having to look around us. As Merleau-Ponty says, our arms cannot be said to be resting on the table next to other objects in the way that the candle can be said to be next to the flower vase. In other words, our body is not a neutral object in abstract space, it is our way of being-in-the-world. Moreover, neither can it be said of other objects in the world that they exist as eternal and inert entities in abstract space. Because we <u>inhabit</u> space in and through our bodies, the things which are in space with us are inhabited by us as well. Therefore, we are in an intimate relationship with objects because we share space with them. We know the world because we belong to it and are of it, because we are incarnated in it. Merleau-Ponty employs the metaphor of intercourse, linguistic, social, and sexual, as a way of stressing the deep relational quality of our knowledge of the world of things.

> To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and coition, so to speak, of our body with things.[1]

In traditional epistemologies the separation of the knower from the known is, I think, partly a result of the dominance of vision as a model for knowing. Beginning with Plato seeing has been the paradigm of both error and truth: error, because the body is said to distort reality, truth, because the body can be transcended through the "eye of the soul." Traditionally, seeing has always implied a distance or epistemic gap between the viewer and the viewed, thus giving rise to the subject-object dichotomy in epistemology. However, even this model is used by Merleau-Ponty in such a way as to counteract this separation between the subject and the object. Vision in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is understood as a form of "touch at a distance," and thus even with respect to seeing no gap can arise between the "gazer" and that which is "gazed at." As Merleau-Ponty puts it in his last work, "The look...envelopes, palpates, espouses the visible things."[2] It is, therefore, also through vision that we are in touch with the so-called "external world," since we are always linked up with phenomena in an integral, inextricable fashion.

In The Visible and the Invisible Merleau-Ponty speaks of the relation between ourselves and the world more specifically. We are linked up with physical phenomena because we are like the, because we are made of the same material, namely flesh. Merleau-Ponty uses this term "flesh" in a rather technical way, and does not seem to limit it to matter in the traditional sense. However, the metaphor of flesh signifies the qualitative similarity between our bodies, which we are, and the objects in the world. He speaks of this "invisible thickness" between the seer and the seen in the following way:

> 'Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things.[3]
>
> It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporaity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication...The thickness of the body...is...the sole means I have to go into the heart of things, but making myself a world and by making them flesh.[4]

According to the above quotations, there is a "flesh of things" and a flesh of ourselves, "the thickness of the body" which can make myself a world and the world a flesh. This common flesh is a result of our mutual interdependence and reciprocity, "a coiling over of the visible upon the visible."[5] Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty says that flesh is not matter, but it is not ideational either. He calls it "a sort of incarnate principle."[6] We are flesh, but things in the world are flesh, too. As I understand it, things are said to be flesh because they are in communication with us and inhabit the same relational space as we do. The qualitative similarity between the knower and the known, the perceiver and the perceived, is expressed by Merleau-Ponty in the following way: "It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it."[7]

Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" is especially difficult to interpret.[8] It serves, I think, as a pivotal metaphor, suggesting a kind of living monism as an alternative to traditional dualisms. This monism is, however, bipolar at the outset. It is neither inanimate matter, on the one hand, nor disembodied mind, on the other. Flesh is, rather, a unique phenomenon, "an incarnate principle" incorporating both physical reality and more,

simultaneously and indistinguishably.

John Sallis calls the relationship between the seer and the seen, between the body and the world, "incorporation." He puts it this way:

> In vision the thing seen is incorporated, the body draws the tissue of the thing to itself in such a way that the thing is made to function as an extension of myself as visible...the thing seen serves as the mediation by which I would be completely present to myself, by which the bodily reflection, the seeing of myself seeing, would be brought to completion.[9]

As Sallis understands Merleau-Ponty's thought with respect to our knowledge of the world, the knower is only complete when in relation to the known. Therefore, it is no longer appropriate to talk of subjects and objects of knowledge as independent entities apart from each other, because it has become clear that a perceiver needs the perceived to be complete. The perceived object is regarded as an extension of the body by Merleau-Ponty.

In order better to understand the intimate relationship between the body and things in the world, it might be helpful to explain how Merleau-Ponty views the role of perceived objects. In his view, the perceived things also "perceive" the human body. Let me try to explain. Since we are embodied beings, we can only experience an from one kinaesthetic perspective at a time. As we look at an object, a cup for instance, from any one perspective we see only one side of it. By seeing that one side we are, in a sense, told by the object where <u>we</u> are. Sallis explains this odd sounding phenomenon in this way:

> The thing, in its very way of presenting itself to my seeing, points to that place from which it is seen, points to the seer's position in the midst of the visible, thereby reflecting back to the seer an image of himself as so

positioned. Hence, in seeing things I see myself seeing.[10] We have all probably experienced something of this phenomenon at a carvival, when we have been turned upside down while riding in a loop-o-plane. Sometimes the only way we can tell that we are upside down is from the fact that the world outside of the plane appears to be upside down. Hence, we are told by our environment how we are placed in it.

The things in the world and our bodies, then, are in an organic and symbiotic relationship to each other. The things get their identity and significance in relation to the body and the body gets its identity and significance in relation to the things. In "Eye and Mind" Merleau-Ponty makes the following remark about the integral relationship between the sensible and the sensed: "Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them."[11]

Consider some concrete examples. Some sculptors, for instance, feel that they need to spend time with the stone which they are planning to work with in order to find out what the stone "wants to be." Eskimo artists have been reported as saying that they are merely releasing the figure from within the stone.

> In Eskimo art an artist's carvings are responses to the material which he works. In the sananguaq-art context his responses are physical, sensuous, tactile and intuitive. The material suggests the subject matter which in turn suggests form. Tiktak has said: 'I do not think out what I will do. My thought comes out while I work. My work expresses my thought.'[12]

Using Sallis' terminology, the object in question seems to "solicit" a response from the subject. Already in Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty spoke of this intercommunication between the body and

the objects in the world in the following way:

> It is my gaze which subtends the color and the movement of my hand which subtends the objects form, or rather my gaze pairs off with color, and my hand with hardness and softness, and in this transaction between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers significance on the other.[13]

Up to this point we have talked about the body's relationship to the known object as symbiotic in a strictly positive manner. In other words, the two have been said to exist in a constructive relationship to each other. Bannan makes a point, however, which sheds light on an additional aspect of this relationship. He seeks to focus the tension which necessarily must exist between the subject and the object of knowledge. Although they are in a symbiotic, interdependent relationship, they must not be thought of as in absolute harmony. Regardless of the fact that the body is a condition for there being any known objects, as such, these objects and body-subject are in a dialectical relationship to each other. Bannan says that "the terms are bound together because of their differences...They are joined in their opposition, opposed in their mutual dependence."[21] In a sense, then, the difference between the subject and the object keeps them apart as much as their commonality keeps them together. Again, the analogy of a magnetic force-field seems to apply. The positive and negative poles each receive their reality, as well as their significance, from the opposing other. The tension between the interdependent poles is both a function of and the condition for their respective realities. So, too, with the knower and the known.

Language also plays a crucial role in our coming to know the

world, according to Merleau-Ponty. However, as we noted earlier, we do not first have language and then name objects with it. Rather, the world and language, as symbiotic dimensions of our embodied existence, shape each other. Therefore, we come to know the world as linguistic as well as embodied beings. Our language both effects and affects our reality, but it is also effected and affected by the world in which we live. As was mentioned in the first chapter, Eskimos have over thirty words for different kinds of snow because their world is made up almost entirely of snow. At the same time, it can be argued that there is a sense in which they have thirty kinds of snow because they have so many words for it. That is to say, as young Eskimo children are inculturated into their world through language, they come to see these many different kinds of snow. The language we use influences how we experience our world and thus how we know our world.

To turn the matter around, people who do not have words for certain realities do not, in many cases, experience those realities. here one is reminded of Charles Darwin's account of how the natives of Tierra del Fuego made absolutely no acknoweldgement of the huge ship which lay at anchor off their shore, presumably because it was simply too far beyond their nautical experience and vocabulary, even though they paid a great deal of attention to the rowboats in which Darwin and the crew had come ashore.[14] Language, for Merleau-Ponty, grows out of our interaction with the world, and thus we cannot speak of the effects of language on the world in a vacuum. However, it can be said that at least in some instances one's language can create, change and reflect one's reality. Merleau-Ponty compares the

relationship between one's body and the world to that between a heart and the organism in which it resides.[15] The body is thus understood as being in a living relationship with the world; it is both of the world and gives life to the world, and yet it cannot live without the world. As a concrete example of this organic relationship, Merleau-Ponty offers an analysis of our encounter with a cube.[16] He says that although we can only see the cube from one angle at a time, and thus never perceive the whole cube, we nevertheless know that it is a cube. Furthermore, he argues that we do not add up all the sensations we receive from various perspectives and conclude that we are experiencing a cube. On the contrary, the cube is experienced by us as a cube in the same way that a part of our own body is experienced as a complete part, say a foot, even though we do not at any time perceive it in its entirety. My body is "already there" for me, it is a given, not a conclusion. Similarly, the world, the cube, is already there for us; its reality and wholeness is, in a sense, self-evident. The world is in some sense part of me, it is an extension of my body, and therefore it is not necessary to engage in an inferential process in order to be assured of its existence. Merleau-Ponty expresses this relationship between the body and the world quite pointedly when he says:

> The thing, the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any 'natural geometry,' but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself.[17]

External objects, therefore, for Merleau-Ponty are not mere natural objects in abstract space, but they are endowed with their identity and significance in relation to the knowing body. It is as if the world and our bodies are woven together by means of their

mutual interaction into a seamless fabric whose pattern is traced and reflected by our language. Merleau-Ponty pinpoints this interaction very effectively when he says that there is

> a relationship of active transcendence between the subject and the world. The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which projects itself.[18]

A bit later on we shall see how the self is a project of the world. For now it is sufficient to focus on how the world is a project of the knowing body-subject.

Mallin comes to this discussion from an interesting angle. He notes the fact that we know there is a six-sided object in front of us even though we can at most only see three sides at any given time. He is concerned about the question of how it is that incomplete perspetival views of an object nevertheless make it very clear to us that these views themselves are incomplete, and thus suggest to us the reality of a complete object. Mallin says that the various perspectives we have of an object are almost "mystically" connected to each other. There is mystery in their connection because if one were to take photographs of all the angles that a person usually has of a cube, for example, seldom if ever would one be able to arrange the photos in a sequence in such a way that the result would in fact be a six-sided, symmetrical cube. Therefore, Mallin thinks, we do not mathematically add our perceptual sensations together and come up with the conclusion that there is a six-sided object here before us. Rather, the object in question is suggested or mediated to us by the incomplete views we have of it. This is how Mallin states the point:

> Yet we have seen that the thing "emanates" from within its appearances. This follows because if the appearances are

> sufficiently fulfilled or "fixed" they refer us to a constant property which carried the accent of the thing itself. Even when these appearances are too vague to give us a particular thing, they still refer us generally to that which has triggered their confused presentation.[19]

Mallin's remarks remind me of the way metaphors and indirect language are often said to function. As indirect forms of speech do not tell all the truth in any given utterance, but tell it "slant,"[20] suggesting the whole truth, so too a limited perspectival view of a given object suggests and mediates the whole object. The fullness of a six-sided cube is experienced in and through the particular yet incomplete perspectives available to us at any one time. And yet, the cube cannot be reduced to a mere collection of such perspectives, but remains a mystery which is evoked by them. Moreover, without these perspectival particulars we would not experience the cube at all. Thus the complete views are both necessary and, in a sense, sufficient for us to know the cube, while the latter is not simply the sum total of the visual particulars from which it emanates or through which it is mediated.

The knowing subject and the known object are, then, for Merleau-Ponty, never thought of as separate entities but are aspects of a single relational phenomenon. They together make up the reality which is knowing, and hence they can be said to constitute each other. A knower becomes a knower in relation to the known, and a known object gets its significance and identity in relation to a knowing subject. With this understanding in mind, let us now move on to a consideration of the second epistemological category mentioned at the outset of this chapter, namely that of our knowledge of other persons.

2. Our Knowledge of Other Persons

We can know other people, in Merleau-Ponty's view, because they have living bodies with the same structures and functions as our own. "In so far as I have sensory functions...I am already in communication with others taken as similar psycho-physical subjects."[22] As we encounter another person interacting with objects in the world which we thought were familiar only to us, we are aware that this other being deals with the objects in the same way as we do. This similar behavior awakens within us a kind of echo. As Merleau-Ponty says:

> ...my body perceives the body of another person, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my intensions, a familiar way of dealing with the world.[23]

We recognize other persons in the same way as we know ourselves, not by means of an inferential process, but by means of a resonance which we discern between their interaction with the world and our own. We are qualitatively alike. We do not experience each other as objects but as subjects and agents, as living bodies inhabiting a common world. Merleau-Ponty maintains that we experience other humans as part of a shared reality, the other part of which we ourselves make up. In fact, the term 'part' is misleading in this context, since other human beings and we cannot be separated from one another. It would be better to speak of two dimensions of one phenomenon.

As it is the case with other things in the world and our own embodied selves, so it is also with our knowledge of other persons in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology. As I and the external world together

create a common epistemic reality, so also does the body in relation to other embodied selves create and sustain a shared reality. In the previous section we considered the body's relation to things in the world and it was mentioned that the body is made up of the same "stuff" as the world, that they share in the commonality of the "flesh." Furthermore, we noted that the relationship between the world and the body is like that between different parts of the body. As the various parts of the body form an organic synthesis, so the body and the world constitute such a synthesis. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of our knowledge of other persons, he specifically employs this particular analogy. For him, the body makes up a system in co-operation with other bodies, not a mechanical system but a functional and organic one which presupposes a mutual understanding rather than seeking one.

> Henceforth, as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and the other person's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously.[24]

The communion we share with other people Merleau-Ponty calls "intersubjectivity." The intersubjective world is created by the interaction amongst embodied subjects who inhabit a common world and share a common fact of being linguistic beings. In fact, for Merleau-Ponty, language is that which distinguishes other <u>persons</u> from mere living bodies, like animals. By language, of course, he does not mean simply "empirical language," but linguisticality at its most primordial level: gesturality. In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty we experience persons as persons primarily by their <u>gestural</u> communication. In the gestures of others we encounter and

discern intentions like our own.

> The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intensions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine his.[25]

In fact, if explicit, formal language was necessary to experience others as persons, we would not think of very young children as persons, since they do not have this type of language as yet. They are not, however, prelinguistic, because they speak with their bodies; they kick and squeeze, cry and smile. In a word, they participate in language through gesture. Conversely, if explicit, formal language was sufficient to experience others as persons, we would naturally think of computers as persons since they excell at this sort of communication. Language, then, is crucial in Merleau-Ponty's view for connecting human beings with each other in an intersubjective world. As Merleau-Ponty himself puts it:

> In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground, my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in the consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.[26]

The role of language in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, as the connection between human beings with the intersubjective world, and thus as the means of our knowledge of other persons as human, is explained by Richard Lanigan quite illuminatingly. Speaking, he says, is that which makes us aware that the other is a conscious being. "Speaking emerges a 'verbal gesticulation' which suggests a

consciousness."[27] Thoughts can never be made objective and public except through speech, understood broadly as gestural. Thus, it is speech which mediates the humanness of other persons to us and links us to others as conscious, intentional beings. Mallin agrees with this point when he says:

> Others are available to us in the same way as we are aware of ourselves, as body-subjects, and their actions are given to us as structures, intentions, or manners of being in the world. Merleau-Ponty maintains that the smallest movement by the other ... is given to us as a gesture, conduct, or 'comportment.'[28]

According to Merleau-Ponty, we experience and know each other as persons within the intersubjective world through our common embodiment and language as gesture, the latter naturally stemming from our bodily existence. Questions concerning the existence of other selves, which have plagued modern philosophy since Descartes, are actually a parasitic phenomenon in that they rest on the self-evident or given character of the reality of other persons. Even to pose a question shows that another person's existence is presupposed, since someone must be there to provide an answer. A newly born baby shows by its behavior that other persons are given as real. A ten-day old baby alrady participates in human intersubjectivity by responding to and imitating the mother's smile, and a fifteen-month old child can participate in various games, such as pretending to bite another's finger,[29] or in playing "peek-a-boo." Such activities on the part of small children have first order intersubjective significance. Children experience another person's smile and laughter as something they, too, can do; they experience a primordial connection and commonality between themselves and other persons. They interact with others as others.

> Between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The possibility of another person's being self-evident is owed to the fact that I am not transparent to myself, and that my subjectivity draws its body in its wake.[30]

The relationship betwen myself and others is like that between a river and a riverbed. The direction, width, and depth of the river is determined by the riverbed, and yet it is just as true to say that the river determines the direction, width, and depth of the riverbed. Each is dependent on the other. So, too, do I and others get our identity and character from our mutual interaction. We are like statements in a dialogue, each statement is a response to a previous one. A specific response is made only after one has heard another person's previous statement. One does not come with ready-made responses to a dialogue. In the same way that each response influences and gives rise to the next, so too do I and other persons influence and "constitute" each other.[31] We noticed in the previous section that language can influence and shape our experience of nonhuman objects in the world. The effecting power of language is even more obvious with respect to human beings. We are all familiar with the notion of a "self-fulfilling prophecy;" if a child is called and treated as a fast or slow learner repeatedly in school and at home, she or he might very well become what these expectations call for. Therefore, language can be seen to have a strong role to play in the construction of our knowledge of other persons, whether on the general or specific level. Other persons and I are part of one and the same existential fabric, we share in the intersubject-ivity of one common human experience.

What exactly does Merleau-Ponty mean when he speaks of the intersubjective world? As I understand it, this notion arises from his understanding of the human subject as embodied. He does not consider the human subject as a self-contained and independent mind or soul installed within a body. Rather, he speaks of the mind as incarnated in the body. The body thus becomes integral to the subject, rather than a "prison house" in which the subject resides. Therefore, the human being is a subejct-object phenomenon, neither a purely subjective nor a purely objective being. As such body-subjects interact they create a woven pattern of relationships which Merleau-Ponty terms "intersubjectivity." The subjects interlace with one another because they are mediated to each other rather than being separated from each other by their bodily dimension. In traditional thought bodies are generally thought of as separating subjects from each other and causing us to think of knowing subjects as existing independently of one another. This way of thinking gave rise to what in contemporary times is called the problem of "other minds." In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, no problem of other minds arises, since other persons are not hidden within unintentional bodies.[32] As Laurie Spurling comments, the existence of others is a given fact of our existence. We cannot get away from others.

> Other people are a permanent horizon to my existence, like a constant double at my side. It is the fact that my existence is constantly de-centered, since it is an interplay between generality and individuality, between anonymity and reflection, that I find the experience of the other as I "generalized I," a potential in all my experience.[33]

The existence of others is not a question here because their

bodies and ours together make each other known. I can only know myself in relation to others and others are known by me in relation to me. If I can raise the question of the existence of other persons, I must be as aware of them as I am of myself. This is so because asking questions is an activity which is learned through interaction with other speakers. If I know myself I must know others. An intersubjective world, then, is created by means of the interaction of intentional body-subjects whose phenomenal fields overlap and intersect. This is how Merleau-Ponty expressed it in the preface to his early major work: "The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears."[34]

Since other selves and one's own self are qualitatively alike, the awareness of other persons poses no real problem. Since we become selves only in relation to others, it would seem strange even to ask how we can know whether other selves exist. As Merleau-Ponty makes clear, for a child the reality of other persons never arises; a child naturally takes up its position in the world in relation to other persons. "The perception of other people and the intersubjective world are problematical only for adults. The child lives in a world which he unhesitatingly believes accessible to all around him."[35] The "reality" of other persons is only a problem when one attempts to take an "objective" position in an abstract, atomistic space, a position which, at the basic human level of existence, is impossible. In a deep sense, then, the knowledge of other persons is primordial within our embodied existence.

The notion of sexuality in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty is an important topic to take up in connection with our discussion of the knowledge of other persons. Sexuality in this context is not limited to sexual relations in the narrow sense of the term. For Merleau-Ponty sexuality includes all of human affectivity. In traditional psychology, the emotions have frequently been regarded as separate from the intellect, acting independently of other dimensions of human existence. Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, thinks they are intimately connected with the other aspects of our being. Speaking specifically of sexuality, he says:

> Sexual life is one more form of original intentionality... sexuality is not an autonomous cycle. It has internal links with the whole active and cognitive being, these...-displaying one typical structure, and standing in relation to each other of reciprocal expression.[36]

We interact with each other through our commonality as sexed, affective beings. Sexuality is our "openness" to others, as Barral puts it.[37] Since sexuality is a form of intentionality, "a general power,"[38] it is not to be understood as a purely bodily instinct, but describes the human way of being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty connects affectiveness with other aspects of our common life in order to exemplify how sexuality is a dimension of human inter-relations. For him, "...sight, hearing, sexuality, the body are not only the routes, instruments or manifestations of personal existence: the latter takes up and absolves into itself their existence as it is anonymously given."[39]

According to this interpretation, for Merleau-Ponty any awareness or knowledge of others is grounded in human sexuality. This is so because intersubjectivity is dependent on human

affectiveness, and this in turn is anchored in our embodied way of being-in-the-world. Human sexuality, like linguistic being, arises within and flows from the interaction between embodied, intentional selves in a physical and social context. Such interaction, in turn, provides both the basis for and the expression of our knowledge of one another as human persons.

Moreover, in this affective relationship among human beings, it is the individual body-subjects which gain the awareness of identity. In Merleau-Ponty's thought there is a transformation from "consciousness" to "self-consciousness." This process begins with "desire."[40] As the individual body-subjects interact with each other, they become aware of their differences as well as of their commonality. This creates a tension within their inter-relationships. Each person, by recognizing others through these differences, also becomes aware of his or her own distinctiveness. This is how Mallin summarizes the way in which individual self-consciousness arises:

> ...in treating the other as a unique spatio-temporal clearing, I become aware of a difference...between our clearings...Each begins to define himself as a person...through expressive exchanges and emotional relations with the other.[41]

If in fact we all are, as persons, part of a common relational field or fabric, then it follows that with respect to the knowledge of others there can exist no epistemic gap between the knower and the known. If there were such a dichotomy between the self and other selves, it would be necessary and problematic to speak of two essentially different entities. Since, however, we get our identity and reality from our relationships to one another this possibility

never actually arises. Thus no distance remains between the knower and the known, according to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, even and especially when we consider the knowledge of other selves.

3. Our Knowledge of Ourselves

Once again I would emphasize that for Merleau-Ponty none of the three epistemological categories, the world, other persons, and the self, can be thought of as independent of each other. All three are known in relation to each other, and so any discussion of any one of them must take place in the context of its relation to the other two. Therefore, the following examination of Merleau-Ponty's view of self knowledge must bear this relationality in mind. Recall what Merleau-Ponty himself said about this mutual interdependence:

> There is a relation of active transcendence between the subject and the world. The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which it projects itself.[42]

Knowlege of the self is much more mysterious or ambiguous for Merleau-Ponty than it was for Descartes. Although in some sense Descartes may have been right in first trying to obtain self-knowledge, he was also quite misguided in attempting, indeed in claiming to have arrived at, knowledge of the "pure" self, completely apart from knowledge of the external world and other selves. He did not realize that our knowledge of the self is molded in relation to other things and selves by means of our interaction with them. It is, therefore, impossible to have initial and total access to a pure, "unadulterated" self without taking the world and other persons into account. In a word, it is impossible to gain any epistemological foothold in a vacuum, to have pure, abstract knowledge of anything whatsoever.

One of the first things which should be recalled and kept in

mind when discussing our knowledge of ourselves is the fact that for Merleau-Ponty the self is not a consciousness or mind existing independently of the body. The self for Merleau-Ponty is, rather, always to be understood as incarnated; it is the body-subject. The self is not, to be sure, a body as an object among other objects, but as a conscious, intending body-subject. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy there is never a separation between the mind and the body; rather, the body is flooded by the mind and the mind is the axis of the body. The mind is a dimension of the self, as is the body, and thus neither can be referred to without at the same time referring to the self. It will be crucial to remember this multi-dimensional character of the self in the following discussion in order to avoid any dualistic assumptions.

Furthermore, it is helpful to keep in mind that for Merleau-Ponty the self is not primitive. This means that we do not arrive in the world as selves, as atomistic "I"s. Children, for example, learn to use the pronoun 'I' only after they have learned to call themselves by their name, as other people refer and speak to them. Frequently a child first calls herself by her own name, then she uses the objective case pronoun 'me,' and finally learns to use the subject case pronoun 'I.'[43] This pattern would seem to correspond to that of the development of the individual self. If the self is a developing reality, it is clearly not primitive in nature. Spurling even remarks that "in the pre-objective, we cannot talk of a self."[44] For his part, Merleau-Ponty calls the "I" "a field, an experience...a fresh possibility of situations,[45] rather than a "self."

It is possible to consider the topic of self-knowledge in the

philosophy of Merleau-Ponty from three related angles. The first would be this: "How is self knowledge related to one's knowledge of one's own body?" Secondly, "How does my relationship to other people affect my knowledge of myself?" Finally, "Is my self-knowledge affected by my relationship to objects in the world around me?" Let us take up these questions in their stated order.

First then, what of the relationship between my self-knowledge and the awareness of my own body? As was mentioned in Chapter One of the present work, in Merleau-Ponty's view one's body creates a unified whole, a "synaesthetic,"[46] perceptual system in which the sensations of the various senses can never be absolutely separated. In other words, it is impossible to isolate the color of an object from its texture and vice versa. The red in cherry juice, for instance, is very different from that in a plush rug. The color of an object, or any of its perceptual qualities, cannot be experienced independently of its other qualities. The picture of a casserole, to take another example, suggests its taste, smell, and even its temperature. In a similar way, a blind person can be said to "see" with the sense of touch and sound.

Another aspect of the unified quality of our experience of our own body comes to light when we recall that our body can be said to be an "affective object" for us. When we are in pain, for example, we both have the pain in a particular place in our body and are in pain ourselves. Thus, the object of the pain and the subject of the pain are one and the same. Furthermore, the subject and object in question are not united as two separate entities, but as one. The affected and the affecting are identical. On the basis of this

affective unity it is easy to see that it is impossible for a gap to exist between the knower and the known with respect to the question of self-knowledge. In this case the subject and the object of knowledge are one and the same.

It seems that at least in some sense Merleau-Ponty uses self-knowledge, with its inherent impossibility for a subject-object dichotomy, as a paradigm for all human knowing. I do not mean to imply that he maintains that self-knowledge provides the basis for our knowledge of the world and other persons. Rather, I mean that in Merleau-Ponty's view our knowledge of things in the world and of other selves bears a structural similarity to our knowledge of ourselves, in that in each case the possibility for an epistemic gap to arise is undercut at the outset by the organic inter-connectedness of the mind, the body, and the world within the fabric of human existence. In some sense one could say that in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology the knower and the known are organically unified since together they constitute a single reality; they each receive their epistemic identity and significance from the other by means of their mutually interdependent interaction.

The knowledge of the self, then, with respect to its epistemic unity, can be interpreted as the paradigm for all modes of knowing according to Merleau-Ponty. In our knowledge of others and of objects, that which is known and that which knows are understood as being in the same relationship to each other as the self is to itself in self-knowledge. It should be remembered that in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy the world and other selves are understood as extensions of the body, which in turn is the incarnation of the self. Thus the

knower and the known in each case are inextricably intertwined with each other; each is experienced and known as a part or aspect of the other.

Now we shall move on to the second consideration within our overall topic for this section: how does our knowledge of other human beings affect our knowledge of ourselves? According to Merleau-Ponty, there is a primordial awareness of oneself which is the condition for all other awareness. This primordial awareness can not be articulated, since it is also the condition for articulation itself. Neither is it reflective, because it is also the condition for reflectiveness. Both articulation and reflection presuppose some form of self-awareness. Thus, although one is not aware of this primordial awareness, it nevertheless is necessarily real because reflection and articulation take place. Mallin explains Merleau-Ponty's view of this primordial connection between the self and the world, including the self itself, in the following way:

> Since a first perception, that is to say, the taking notice of a particular and distinctive phenomenon, is only possible through a rebalancing of the body-subject's general grasp, before the first perception one must be 'already at work in a world' and spatially already acquired.[47]

Merleau-Ponty himself calls this primordial relationship to the world "the most ancient pack between 'x' and the world in general."[48] Mallin terms this 'x' "a natural or captive self."[49] There seems, then, to be a self-awareness which cannot be articulated but is the ground out of which any explicit awareness or knowledge of the self emerges. This primordial, prereflective awareness of 'x' is the condition for an articulated knowledge of the self.

In Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty termed this pre-

reflective self, or primordial "I," the "tacit cogito."[50] On the other hand, he called the reflective self a "verbal" or "spoken cogito," and claimed that the "I" spoken of by Descartes in his Second Meditation was the latter. Merleau-Ponty went on to say that the verbal cogito is only possible because of the tacit cogito. Here is how he put the matter:

> ...I should find [words] not so much derivative and inauthentic as meaningless, and I should be unable even to read Descartes' book, were I not, before any speech can begin, in contact with my own life and thought, and if the spoken cogito did not encounter within one a tacit cogito.[51]

Many of Merleau-Ponty's interpreters are ill-at-ease with the term "tacit cogito" when discussing the possibility of the primordial self, because Merleau-Ponty himself rejected the term in his last work, The Visible and the Invisible. In the "Working Notes" at the end of this volume, Merleau-Ponty reminds the reader of how he originally talked of a primordial self-awareness in the Phenomenology of Perception:

> The cogito of Descartes... is an operation on significations, a statement of relations between them... It therefore presupposes a prereflective contact of self with self...or a tacit cogito...this is how I reasoned in Phenomenology of Perception, Is this correct? What I call the tacit cogito is impossible.[52]

The reason, according to the "later Merleau-Ponty," for claiming to have been wrong in calling the primordial "I" a tacit cogito is that by definition cogitation can never be tacit in nature. Consciousness, after all, can only be conscious and thus explicit, while the notion of tacit awareness excludes articulation. The expression "tacit cogito" would seem to be a contradiction in terms. This is how Merleau-Ponty himself expresses the problem:

> To have the idea of 'thinking,' ...to make the 'reduction,' to return to immanence and to consciousness...it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words... that I form the transcendental attitude, that I constitute the constitutive consciousness.
>
> Yet there is a world of silence,...an order where there are non-language significations...[53]

Merleau-Ponty rejects the tacit cogito, at least in this note, then, because thinking (cogitation) can only take place in words and that which is tacit is necessarily impossible to articulate. The "world of silence" cannot be referred to in terms of a tacit cogito.

Samuel Mallin is one interpreter of Merleau-Ponty who disagrees with prevailing opinion, and with Merleau-Ponty himself, concerning the rejection of the notion of a tacit cogito. According to Mallin, Merleau-Ponty ignored his own criticism and went on using the notion later on in the "Working Notes" themselves. For example, just a few pages after the above quotation Merleau-Ponty refers to the tacit cogito while discussing the nature of language. Although at this point he notes that in Phenomenology of Perception the concept of tacit cogito did not explain how one moves from the silent cogito to the speaking cogito, he does not say that he was wrong in referring to the silent self as a cogito. Rather, he says that this way of speaking was incomplete. "I did not arrive at a solution...on the contrary I posed a problem."[54] Merleau-Ponty continued to use the notion of the tacit cogito in the main text of The Visible and the Invisible, which was written after the "Working Notes." Mallin thinks, therefore, that fortunately Merleau-Ponty did not take heed of his own criticism.

Other interpreters of Merleau-Ponty, specifically Remy Kwant, maintain, on the other hand, partly on the strength of his self

criticism, that Merleau-Ponty not only rejected the notion of the tacit cogito, but much of the Phenomenology of Perception as well. Mallin strongly disagrees with this interpretation. In an important footnote in his book Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy he states his case quite pointedly:

> Merleau-Ponty is much too hard on himself in these notes, for his criticism applies, if at all, to some nonessential arguments on two or three pages of the Phenomenology of Perception where he may have begun to slip into a Cartesian mode of description... Merleau-Ponty's normal and intended use of the expression 'tacit cogito' in both texts is just the opposite of a rationalist one...these particular notes are of little merit and very misleading.[55]

For myself, I had read through Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the tacit cogito in Phenomelogy of Perception without ever thinking that he fell into a rationalistic mode. On the contrary, I think he was very clear in showing that the rationalistic interpretation of the cogito rests on the assumption of an unarticulated, prereflective awareness of the self which does not entail a consciousness in the Cartesian sense. In fact, since for Merleau-Ponty all thought and langauge are grounded in and mediated by embodied interaction, such a tacit awareness of the self would seem both possible and required.

So, for Merleau-Ponty there would seem to be an awareness of a primordial "I" which is not an awareness of an individual self, but which is, rather, an awareness of a self which is constituted as part of the world and other persons. The French word "on" conveys the sense of such a tacit, universal self better than the English word "one." In English, for example, we say "Someone is singing," while in French it is possible to say "On chante." The French indefinite pronoun "on" is used to refer either to a person or to a group of persons, while the English world "one" refers exclusively to a single

individual.[56] "On," therefore, is more helpful when speaking of the tacit cogito because the latter is a "universal I" rather than a particular one, for Merleau-Ponty.

As a nonindividuated self, operating at the "universal I" level, interacts with other selves, it becomes aware of distinctions among and between them and itself. As was mentioned in the previous section, both a commonality and a tension are created within the relationship between the one and the many. Thus a self becomes aware that she or he is in some sense different or distinct from the other objects and persons in the world. Differentiation, then, gives rise to a realization of individuality, a realization which is reflected in the way a child develops from referring to herself by her name to using the first person pronoun "I." However, no matter how different a person may be from others, one is never totally distinct, but remains a pole or dimension in a relational force-field. In fact, this very individuality can only arise, according to Merleau-Ponty, within and as a result of such symbiotic relationality. Others provide the necessary condition for one's becoming and continuing as an individual self. Merleau-Ponty puts it poignantly:

> I am a field, an experience. One day, once and for all, something was set in motion which, even during sleep, can no longer cease to see or not to see, to feel or not to feel, to suffer or be happy, to think or rest from thinking, in a word to 'have it out' with the world. There then arose, not a new set of sensations or states of consciousness, not even a new monad or a new persepctive... there arose a fresh <u>possibility of situations</u>... There was henceforth a new setting, the world received a fresh layer of meaning.[57]

Other persons have yet another role to play in the development of self-knowledge. It was mentioned earlier that the way in which we speak of and interact with others affects the way we know them. Now

let us focus on the other side of this "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon. The way in which others talk to and treat me also has a strong influence on the way I know myself. If a black person, for example, is spoken to and interacted with as a "nigger," he or she might very well come to know himself or herself as one. Even the one who calls another person by such a name gets defined by this very act. A person's self-identity grows out of the dialectical relationships comprising the environment, both social and physical, into which they are cast.

The third question that was posed at the beginning of this section was this: Is one's knowledge of oneself affected by objects in the world? In the first section of the present chapter we considered our knowledge of what is often called "the external world," and it was mentioned that things do not exist independently in an abstract space. Rather, things in the world are always and only known in relationship, as tools in intersubjective space. We also noted that the world as such gets its identity from these relationships, as well. Things are, as it were, inhabited by us because they are in the space which is inhabited by our bodies. Furthermore, we inhabit the world because we are made of the same "stuff," both we and the world are "flesh." What, then, is the influence of our interaction with things in the world on our knowledge of ourselves?

Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to say that "... a subject is nothing but a project of the world."[58] He maintains that as I gaze at a thing in the world, the thing looks back at me. Further, as I touch an object the object touches me back. This means that as I see

an object from a particular perspective, for example, this perspectival angle points to the place from which it is perceived. As I look at a cabinet, for instance, from the front, I am told that I am in fact in front of the cabinet. In addition, my height is communicated to me by the objects in the world. As I see the top of a table rather than the bottom of it, I am told that I am above the table, and so on. If I must constantly duck my head when going through doors, sit with my feet dangling off the floor, or buy specially large-sized clothes, I come to know myself as tall, short, or fat, respectively. Thus much of what we know about ourselves results from our interaction with objects in the world.

It is perhaps easier to see that self-knowledge is at least partly constituted by our relationship to the physical environment when we consider the life of a blind person. Since a blind person must rely more on the sense of touch and hearing, the role of objects in the world in communicating one's whereabouts and identity seems somehow more obvious. When considering Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, it is really misleading, however, to think this way, since for Merleau-Ponty seeing is interpreted as touch at a distance. When we observe a blind person walking down the street, we can easily see how the environment tells that person where she or he is. It is essentially the same with those of us who are not blind, according to Merleau-Ponty, for we are "in touch" with the world through our gaze. What we see, as well as what we hear, feel, and smell, is our way of knowing how and where we are located.

We realize, then, that in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology we come to know ourselves in relation to objects and other persons as we

interact with them. Because of the organic character of this interaction, there is no room for a gap between the knower and the known. The self knows itself in and through its knowledge of other things and persons. Also, between the body-subject and the world of things there is no epistemic distance to be overcome, because the two are constantly involved in a symbiotic interdependency. Our relationship with the world is, for Merleau-Ponty, similar to that of the parts of our body to the body itself.

Finally, no gap between the knower and the known is possible with respect to the body-subject and other body-subjects. The subject and other persons create and exist within an intersubjective world, a world which is presupposed by the very process of calling it into question. Other persons are always a dimension of myself, according to Merleau-Ponty, and vice versa, as well. The "universal I" never truly disappears. Although one becomes an individual, this indivudality remains within the intersubjective world, sustained by and sustaining it.

NOTES

Chapter 2

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, tr. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 320.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 133.

3. Ibid., p. 132-3.

4. Ibid., p. 135.

5. Ibid., p. 140.

6. Ibid., p. 139.

7. Ibid., p. 135.

8. It is not possible here to go any deeper into the notion of the flesh. For further investigation see "Eye and Mind," by Mikel Dufrenne, in Merleau-Ponty, Perception, Structure, Language, ed. John Sallis, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981), pp. 1 to 3. Also see Speaking and Seminology, by Richard L. Lanigan, (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 204-7.

9. John Sallis, Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1973), p. 91.

10. Ibid, p. 91.

11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 164.

12. George Swinton, Sculpture of the Eskimo (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1972), p. 142.

13. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 214.

14. Michael Polany, Knowing and Being, ed. Marjorie Greene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 113.

15. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 203.

16. Ibid., p. 203.

17. Ibid, P. 205.

18. Ibid, p. 430.

19. Samuel B. Malin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 137.

20. Emily Dickenson, The Poems of Emily Dickenson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vol. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), J1129 "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant. Truth in circuit lies."

21. John F. Bannan, The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1967), p. 64.

22. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 353.

23. Ibid., p. 354.

24. Ibid., p. 354.

25. Ibid., The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, p. 83.

26. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 354.

27. Richard L. Lanigan, Speaking and Seminology (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1972), p. 185.

28. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 253.

29. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 352.

30. Ibid., p. 352.

31. Ibid., p. 354.

32. This statement needs to be qualified. Merleau-Ponty discusses solipsism and says that although "the truth of solipsism is there... I can fly from being only into being... I escape from society into nature, or from the real world into an imaginary one made of the broken fragments of reality... I can evolve a solipsist philosophy but, in doing so, I assume the existence of a community of men endowed with speech, and I address myself to it." Ibid, p. 360.

33. Laurie Spurling, The Phenomenology and the Social World (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 42.

34. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. xx.

35. Ibid., p. 355.

36. Ibid., p. 157.

37. Mary Rose Barral, The Body in Interpersonal Relations (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), p. 147.

38. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 158.

39. Ibid., p. 160.

40. Ibid., The Visible and the Invisible, p. 144.

41. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 266.

42. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 430.

43. For further information concerning this pattern and the development of the awareness of self in children, see Pattern and Growth in Personality, by Gordon W. Allport (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1937), pp. 110-138. Also, see The Enterprise of Living, Growth and Organization in Personality, by Robert W. White (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 368-422.

44. Ibid., Phenomenology and the Social World, p. 35.

45. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 406-7.

46. Ibid., p. 228-9.

47. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 57.

48. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 254.

49. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 57.

50. Ibid., Phenomenology of Perception, p. 402.

51. Ibid, p. 402.

52. Ibid., The Visible and the Invisible, p. 171.

53. Ibid., p. 171.

54. Ibid., p. 176.

55. Ibid., Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy, p. 59, fr. 8.

56. An example of the use of "on" is the following from Phenomenlogy of Perception, p. 406.

"Both universality and the world be at the core of individuality and the subject, and this will never be understood (on ne le comprendra jamais, p. 465 French) as long as the world is made into an object. It is understood immediately (on le comprend aussitot) if the world is the field of our experience..."

57. Ibid., p. 406-7.

58. Ibid., p. 430.

CONCLUSION

Has Merleau-Ponty, then, resolved the problem of the subject-object dichotomy? It seems to me that he has by construing the knower as the body-subject. At the very least, he has provided a way of approaching the problem which holds much promise for dismantling it before it can do its damage. The dichotomy is created by first separating the knowing subject from the object of knowing. This separation stems from conceiving the mind as the sole source and basis of knowledge, thereby cutting it off from the world and other minds. In Merleau-Ponty's epistemology, the knowing subject is not a disembodied mind, but a mind incarnated, a body which is an intentional subject. No epistemic gap can exist between the knower and the known, whether the latter be the self, the world, or other persons, because in each case the realities involved exist within and constitute an organic unity which allows for no cognitive distance between mind and body. Our bodies are interlaced with those of other persons in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of a gap between ourselves and others, epistemically speaking. In like manner, our bodies and the objects of the world are of "one flesh," they inhabit each other, and are extensions of each other.

The epistemological problem of the subject-object dichotomy has been resolved by Merleau-Ponty by viewing the body at the outset as an intentional, active knower. The problem arose from a dualism which separated the mind from the body and regarded the body as an object among other objects. By rejecting mind-body dualism, and by understanding the world and others as intimately connected with the

body-subject, the traditional subject-object dichotomy, the distance between the knower and the known, is overcome.

Let me conclude by indicating some areas which warrant, even demand, further exploration and scrutiny in Merleau-Ponty's epistemology. For while it seems to me that he has provided an excellent point of departure, as well as some promising guidelines, for the construction of a fresh and highly fruitful post-Cartesian philosophy, a good deal of work remains to be done.

One area of particular importance would be the relationship between Merleau-Ponty's epistemology and the familiar contemporary distinction between "knowing <u>how</u>" and "knowing <u>that</u>." It is frequently claimed that phenomenological analyses, such as that of Merleau-Ponty, may provide a fine account of the <u>psychology</u> of how we came to know, but they have no bearing on the <u>philosophical</u> issue of what constitutes knowledge in the propositional sense. Just what is the connection between Merleau-Ponty's redefinition of the role of the body and cognitive, reflective knowledge? Michael Polanyi is one thinker who has sought to draw on Merleau-Ponty's work in the development of what he calls "a post-critical epistemology."[1]

Another area for further study would be the implications of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language. Of special interest here is the sense and degree to which the bi-polar characterization of experience and language entails a specific view of the origin and structure of linguistic activity. Is there a sense in which human language is autonymous or is it essentially a function of social interaction? The investigations of the later Wittgenstein would seem relevant here, and both Laurie Spurling[2] and Nicholas Gier[3]

have explored these possibilities.

Finally, a discussion of the implications of Merleau-Ponty's relational epistemology for metaphysics would be a very worthwhile endeavor. Initially there would seem to be certain natural points of contact between the notions of the symbiotic interdependence and the developmental character of the self, on the one hand, and the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, on the other hand. Harold Oliver's work[4] in "relational metaphysics" explores some of these connections.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

1. Michael Polanyi, Knowing and Being, ed. Marjorie Greene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), see especially pp. 155, 157, 221-222.

2. Laurie Spurling, Phenomenology and the Social World (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 2-3. 61-66, 156-7, 175-9.

3. Nicholas, F. Gier, Wittgenstein and Phenomenology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), pp. 203-230 and 254.

4. Harold Oliver, Relational Metaphysics (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980).

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